

(When I added page numbers, the references returned, but they are not consistent. Some are in the chapters, some at the end. I'm sorry for any inconvenience this causes, but am sure we will square it away before long. Enjoy, and please send me any appropriate comments.
Love, Frank Smith)

WHAT IS THIS THING WE CALL CHURCH? © Introduction

Jesus came into the world that we might have life, and have it to the full. Our real life with God had been lost in the Garden, and He Himself came to restore it to us. Actually, Jesus gives us more than was lost as God Himself now lives in us. He no longer just walks with us; He lives in us as we walk everywhere. We are never separated from Him Who is our life. In Him we live and move and have our being.

However, our enemy deceives us into foolish and stupid errors. We take this life, and turn it into a religion. We quickly forget that He is in us. We take the forgiveness of sins that Jesus earned and procured for us, once for all, and develop sin management systems. We sew up again the veil that God ripped from top to bottom, and then fret and fuss thinking, "I have to get back in there." We make up religious ways to get back into the Holy of Holies even though the barrier of the veil is forever shredded. We make mixtures of the Old and New Covenants. We forget that Jesus blood is the covering over the mercy seat, and that now God comes out and lives in us and uses us as His instruments. We set up priests or clergy patterned after the pagan religions, and elevate them to high and holy offices.

We call this aberration, "church." Moreover, most of us have separated "church" from life. We think of church as an experience separated from our real life. It is something that we "do" or attend. This is an abomination before God. Jesus came into the world to give us life, not a religion or system. He came to give us the life that is Himself. He calls us out of the world and into His Body, His church.

What is this thing we call "church?" What constitutes church? What is church and what is not church? God help us as we seek His face and His answers to these questions and more.

Getting Started

This book is full of ideas, concepts, teachings, interpretations, and doctrines. For some these can be dull and boring, and for others exciting and informative. I pray that as you consider these things about church, above all else you can touch the heart of God beneath them.

The heart of our Lover is so enraptured with His Bride, His Church, that He says, "Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me."¹ Jesus is so in love with us that our seeking His face causes Him to be overwhelmed with love. He goes on to lovingly describe our feet, graceful legs, navel, waist, breasts, neck, eyes, nose, head, hair -"How beautiful you are and how pleasing."²

May we begin to see ourselves as He sees us. Look into the mirror, but not one of those magnifying types that highlight our flaws and blemishes. Look into the mirror of the perfect law that gives freedom.³

"I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me."⁴ Feel His heart. Rejoice in His love. Respond with your own affirmations of love for Him Who loved us first. This is the heart of the Church's worship, the Bride's exaltation of her husband. Pray the prayer of the beloved, "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy as unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned."⁵

The church is this Bride preparing for the wedding. The church is this body enraptured in a love relationship with her Head. The expression of this love for her lover is perhaps the highest and most wonderful thing the church can do. It is like the lavish and extravagant act of love when Mary anointed Jesus with the costly spikenard.

I pray that I might be faithful in presenting God's plan and pattern for church, but also true in revealing His heart.

The purpose of this book is to set people free from religious bondage to live glorious, fruitful, and victorious lives in Christ

¹ Song of Songs 6:5

² Song of Songs 7:6

³ James 1:25

⁴ Song of Songs 7:10

⁵ Song of Songs 8:6,7

Chapter One How I Got Here

The Journey to Church Here Presented

My views on church are radical – to the root. “Radical” is a good word that is often demonized into a negative. The ax is already at the root says John the Baptizer.ⁱ The views presented in this book are biblical and I believe correct, but they run counter to many known concepts of church. The church as presented in these pages is a magnificent and out-of-the-box entity, and before I lose you as a reader, I wish to begin by telling you of my journey to this place.

We are all the product of inheritance and environment. At birth, we get the potentials and shortcomings from our ancestors as filtered through our parents. Then our experience fleshes out who and what we are. We are forever becoming. Arrival may come later when we graduate from this life, but even then, heaven may be a growing existence also.

When we are born from above, we receive a transplant of the DNA of Christ Jesus. It filters through our father Abraham. Then our experiences with God and His people shape our beliefs and ministry, our doctrines and life, our foundations and ventures. We are not talking about a static, sedate life that is concerned with holding on to what we have. This new life is dynamic, growing, and changing. It is exuberant, blessed, and full of pathos. In life, God works in all situations to bring about His good purpose for our lives – to conform us to the image of His Son.ⁱⁱ

Before Paul and Barnabus returned from the first missionary trip, they revisited many of the newly planted fellowships and encouraged the disciples to remain true to the faith. They said, “We must go through many hardships (tribulation) to enter the Kingdom of God.”ⁱⁱⁱ The Greek word for hardship and tribulation is “Thlipsis, “distress brought on by outward circumstances.”^{iv} Because our loving Father oversees this pressure and allows its use for His purposes, we can “count it all joy” when the stuff of life squeezes us.^v

Jesus was not a conscious part of my childhood. Church, however, was sporadically involved. When my two brothers and I stayed with our grandparents for the weekend, we were brought to Sunday School at a Congregational Church. My father was killed during WW II and Mom, a freethinking, pre-feminist, took us infrequently to a Unitarian Church. I recall those few services I did attend during those years fidgeting with all the impatience of a rebellious youth. It was not so much a hostile environment, but it was boring, irrelevant, and unintelligible. I wanted nothing to do with it. Later in High School, my wild friends and I would sometimes go to a local Presbyterian Church to pick up girls at a youth meeting.

My wife and I eloped in 1953, during my second year of university, and her first year of nurses training. Our plan was to have a big wedding later, but you guessed it, she got pregnant. Her folks were furious. Betty was nineteen and I was just twenty. Her folks were strong Missouri Synod Lutherans, and in an effort to appease them, I went to the adult membership class.

I told the old German Pastor that I was there to keep peace in the family and that I would never join his church. As far as I was concerned, Christians were all hypocrites. They had a bunch of rules, no one kept them, and I wanted no part of it. There were only five in the weekly class, but he stretched it out for over a year. I think he saw that God was setting a hook in me. It struck me somewhere during that time that Christianity is not rules, but the love and forgiveness of God. Jesus Christ actually came into the world to rescue me. He died in my place, rose to life again, and is forever alive and actually loves me personally. I could not fight such love, nor did I want to. I received Jesus, joined the congregation, and immediately began teaching Sunday School.

After graduating from the university in May of 1955, the Pastor and his wife came over to our house for dinner and some Pinochle. He said I should go to the seminary and study to become a Pastor. I had just started my career in Real Estate and told him I did not think so. A few days later I was lying in bed and suddenly felt this electricity go through my body. It was as if someone put my fingers and toes in light sockets. A bright light began to fill everything, eyes opened or closed, and I thought I was going to die. That thought was okay, but then I realized I was about to see God face to face, and I was terrified. The “ministry” overrode all my circuits, and I said, “Not yet, Father. I’ll go.” The lights and energy ceased as quickly as it had started.

Since I was such a new convert, the seminary would not accept me for that fall. I told them I did not want to begin another career and would move to Illinois to be by the school where they could counsel me about classes and activities. We sold our car, bought an old truck, loaded everything we owned on board, and the day we left, there was a letter of acceptance from the seminary. I was accepted, but with the stipulation of taking two years pre-seminary, three years of seminary and one year of internship. Our first-born son turned one year old on the road in August of 1955.

My mother was upset that I had joined the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod because of their strong stand against Masonry. She said I should join one of the other Lutheran Denominations that allowed Masonic membership. Both sides of our family were Masons, and Mom was Eastern Star. However, my Grandpa died just after I was converted and at his funeral, it became crystal clear that if what the preacher said about Jesus was true, then what the Masons said about brother Guy’s good life earning him a place in the Grand Lodge Above was false.

The Holy Spirit had made it clear about the scriptures, and I went into this new world at the Seminary with the prayer, “Lord, I know You are true, and the Bible is true. I will stick with these Lutherans as long as I am sure they are sticking with You.” Once during those years I dropped out of classes for a few days over a question about election and predestination, but Luther’s treatise on free will satisfied me.

I am grateful for the Missouri Synod’s strong stand on the Bible and much of the teaching I received. Their doctrine of the church was that every person who believes in Jesus is a part of the church, although they demanded doctrinal purity and limited their church fellowship to those with whom they had “pulpit and

altar fellowship.” These were the only other Christians who could commune at our altars or speak in our pulpits. Our denomination kept itself pure from all the other heretics and misguided Christians. Our pulpit and altar fellowship at that time was limited to the Finnish Lutheran Church and the Wisconsin Synod.

Technically, we could not pray publicly with other Christians who were not in pulpit and altar fellowship with us unless we did all the praying. Otherwise we might give the impression that we believe the same things as these other “lesser” Christians. I, as well as many others, did not follow that precept.

We received a call in May of 1961 by the Mission Board of the Southern California District and were assigned to Brea, La Habra, and North Fullerton in Orange County. We arrived to a group of five families that had been meeting with denominational representatives for about six months. Our first meeting place was a dance studio in Brea that we used on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. By Christmas time, there were 46 men women and children in the flock. We all decided to hold a Christmas morning service at 6:00 AM. We encouraged everyone to bring the children in pajamas, gather for worship and then go home and open gifts or do whatever their Christmas traditions were. That morning there were 46 persons gathered in one of the warmest most loving services I had ever experienced. Never again were one hundred percent of the members present at anything at the same time.

As we searched for property on which to build a permanent building for the church, we experienced a great deal of NIMBY - not in my back yard. We almost purchased one parcel and I went calling door to door in the neighborhood. Many fearful residents fought us and traffic congestion was the rallying cry. I recall one house where the woman interrupted my greeting with, “I know who you are, now get off my property before I sic the dogs on you.”

We finally purchased a five-acre parcel on Imperial Highway in Brea just one block from the dance studio. A few weeks later we were informed that the dance studio was sold to another Lutheran Church Group, and they evicted us. This was just before Resurrection Sunday. I spoke with them about waiting a few weeks since they had not started meeting yet, but they were quite adamant that we had to go.

In one month’s time we graded the area for a parking lot at the new property, leased three trailers, one for offices and meeting rooms and a double wide with no interior walls for Sunday and Wednesday meetings. We met on the parking lot in this portable chapel for several months until the Parish Hall was far enough along that we could move inside. Work on the sanctuary went on for several more months. We members did a lot of the labor ourselves.

This was a very sweet time. An exciting camaraderie and oneness were over all we did. I recall one time painting the ceiling on a raised platform with an auto mechanic, an orthopedic surgeon who would later perform my first hip transplant, and a laborer. We were like a group of teen-agers just hanging out together. I think God approves of church construction projects for the good things that happen in the process. As in so much of life, the process is more blessed than the result.

About a year after we moved into the new building and the congregation

had grown to several hundred, I reminisced in a sermon about those sweet beginning days of community and closeness. I said that sometimes I think I should light a match and burn the building down so we could do it again. I was completely unprepared for the rage and anger several people displayed against me because I made threats about their "church."

These were basically the same people who forcefully requested that I begin the service by loudly proclaiming Habakkuk 2:20, "The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him."

The previous summer I had another experience that shaped or perhaps un-shaped my perception of this thing we call church. Much of my theological education was in an anti-Catholic mode. Not catholic meaning universal, but anti-Roman Catholic. We would study, "They teach.... (Roman Catholic); the Bible teaches..." I got frozen in a 450 year controversy locked in a time warp. I became negative towards Roman Catholics. As a part of my Lutheran ordination I had to vow that the Lutheran Confessions were a true interpretation of Scripture. Those confessions included the judgment that, "The Papacy is the Anti-Christ."

I did a lot of door-to-door evangelism, or perhaps more accurately "church selling" during those beginning years. I was careful about "sheep stealing," receiving a Christian into our congregation who was a member of another Christian congregation. Even encouraging them to change fellowships was a no-no. However, every Roman Catholic was fair game.

If you could win a Roman Catholic, that was okay. You just got a real prize. More power to you. Keep up the good work.

One day in early summer I got a phone call from the Roman Catholic congregation asking if they could come by and make a presentation. I felt trapped and mouthed some words. They said it would only take a few minutes, and I reluctantly agreed.

About twenty minutes later two Nuns, several lay teachers, and about 100 children from the third and fourth grades came marching into our Sanctuary. I thought those Penguins (forgive me Lord) would desecrate the place. (From my present perspective forty five years later, I sometimes refer to myself during those days as a Franchise Director of a Lutheran High Place.)

The children began to speak. This is the way I remember it. They spoke one at a time and said, "We are studying the Bible in Vacation Bible School." (What kind of nonsense is this? Roman Catholics don't teach the Bible. They don't have Bible Schools.) "We are studying about love and unity. Because we are all Christians we want to give you this Banner as an expression of our love and that we are one in Jesus." (Explosions began going off inside something like Hiroshima.)

At this point several children unrolled a large butcher-paper collage about thirty feet long. On the paper were pictures and drawings of every day activities. There were homes, schools, hospitals, cars "churches," factories, businesses, etc. etc. They said, "Christians are people who are forgiven by Jesus. We love Him and show that love by the way we live our every day lives at home, in school, at work and play. We love you and want to give this to you."

I don't recall how soon I began to cry, but tears come to my eyes again

now just remembering this beautiful, freeing experience of forty some years ago. Way back then God was hammering on my myopic view of this thing we call church.

The 1960's were a whirlwind of activities and ministry. I worked hard at the ministry. In fact, I often prayed in those early years, "Lord, You take care of my family, and I'll build the church." Today I am surprised that God did not strike me dead with such an attitude. He sees our heart, and as wrong as those priorities were, it was a genuine request. That kind of attitude was much more prevalent in those pre-Promise Keepers, pre-Focus on the Family years. I recall a Seminary Professor saying things much like my misguided prayer.

As the congregation grew and I got busier, I also got more and more involved in denominational activities. My first assignment was Mission Education Director. Betty and I led a group of young people in a hands on, live with the people trip to Japan, Hong Kong and the Philippines. We then trained them as a speaker's bureau for the Southern California Arizona District. My next position was Circuit Counselor with oversight of eight to ten congregations, then I was chosen to the Board of Directors of the District, and even elected as President of the District Pastors Conference. I loved shepherding the growing congregation, but I enjoyed even more the denominational work and the fellowship of the brothers.

During the early 1970's God began to speak to me. "Get your house in order, and I will entrust you with a vision." So, I began to spend more time at home with the family. Betty could have responded with, "Who are you and where have you been these past fifteen years?" She was gracious and I feel we made headway.

Also in 1970, Betty got pregnant and wanted an abortion. We had five children from 1954 to 1961, and this was too much for her. Her Counselor said to get an abortion, her Medical Doctor told her to get an abortion, and her Obstetrician agreed and scheduled a D and C. I disagreed, resisted, and was miserable. However, cowardice prevailed and I knowingly capitulated and followed the example of Adam. The D & C (abortion) was done just before Thanksgiving in 1970.

Around Christmas time, Betty was reading a book and it literally jumped on her lap. There had been twins in her womb and one of them survived. Now the Doctors and Counselors said she had to get a late term abortion, as the baby would be terribly damaged from the D & C. The Ob Gyn Doctor who had done the D & C and later delivered Sarah led this counsel. He was adamant that it must be done, as the child would probably be a vegetable. Betty, however, had bonded with the precious child fighting for life, and although she lost her amniotic fluid on a daily basis and spent the last few months in bed, Sarah Ruth Smith was born on our eighteenth wedding anniversary.

Sarah and Betty have been speaking and working for the cause of life since 1990. Sarah is a powerful envoy for the unborn who speaks and challenges as a survivor on their behalf. She has slowed down her work due to the chronic pain she endures since a botched hip replacement in the 1990's. I traveled and also spoke with them in Rome in 1996, just a few months after suffering a heart

attack. During this trip we met Pope John Paul II and I actually had a few words with him about my book, Malchus, and his encyclical Ut Unum Sint (That They All Be One). It was an excellent presentation on unity, but of course, our unity must be under the “Bishop” of Rome. Another lesson in this thing we call “church.”

Whoops, I jumped ahead of the story. “Get your house in order and I’ll entrust you with a vision,” As I was home more and attempted to pick up the headship of the family which I had forsaken for ministry (still trying), God began to lay out the vision. Church in the home, leadership raised up from within, the restoration of apostles and prophets, and the nature of church of the city. In my zeal, I actually prepared a constitution and by-laws for Home Congregation Fellowship. I knew who the leaders were to be, and where the first house church was to be located. But, God continued to say, “Wait and get your house in order.” I waited and waited and waited.

One Thursday in the mid 1970’s, at a Pastors meeting in the city, the Lord spoke to me and said, “Start.” I knew exactly what He meant. Friday was my day off and I did nothing about it. Saturday was busy, Sunday always a marathon, and then on Monday morning a weird friend who said he was a prophet (all prophets are wonderfully weird) knocked on my door. He said, “The Lord sent me to rebuke you and give you Micah 5:7. – ‘The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for man or linger for mankind.’”

I quickly responded and we held the initial meeting that Thursday. First, however, I reacted with anger at the rebuke. The default mechanism of the old nature dies hard. It only took a few minutes to come to my senses and realize it was a loving act for God to correct me and send a prophet. In addition, I realized how courageous my friend was to come and deliver this message. I know how I have squirmed and weaseled when called on to give a gentle correction much less an outright rebuke.

Another pastor of a different denomination in the city asked me to be his pastor. This was incompatible with my Lutheran denomination’s dogma and also with his Pentecostal denomination. He was a young man without much training for the job and when the leaders of that “church” fired the old pastor, he was elevated to Senior Pastor. This congregation was, as many are, a man-eater.

I was certain God wanted this relationship, and it fit into the pattern of one church per city ruled by the elders in mutual submission. I went to the Pentecostal denominational hearing with my brother. They let me sit in the group. There were six or seven officials, and us. This was, by my assessment, a very efficient kangaroo court. He was removed from office for “unloving” behavior – translated not bowing to the officials. Ten years later in the mid-west, I accompanied another brother and his wife to a similar hearing of the same denomination with the same result. This man started another local congregation, which is still flourishing after twenty years.

Because the Missouri Synod is so doctrinally tight, God had to open my mind and heart to the other Christians, and the doctrinal differences. During this time in the 1970’s I began to care for the wife of the local Baptist Pastor. She died a long agonizing cancer death and for a couple years I visited her regularly

at home and in the hospital. Mac, her husband, and I became good friends. One day as he walked me out to the car we were talking about church membership and he was telling me how he was visiting all the non-attending members. They gave him all kinds of excuses about not coming to the meetings, but often said something like, "I'm saved and I'll see you in the rapture." As he continued about the salvation of these people, I realized we believed the same thing.

How could this be? His denomination taught once saved always saved, and mine taught you could fall away from your salvation. As I studied the issue, I began to see both positions clearly in the scriptures.

Also, during this same time, I was a delegate to the Missouri Synod Convention in New Orleans. There were three major issues facing us: The historical critical method of Bible interpretation, can our young people be in scout troops, and the third use of the law. Some of you may be thinking how nit-picky, but we actually had a small schism over these issues. The scouting issue was raised because the Wisconsin Synod, with whom we had pulpit and altar fellowship, said their youth should not be a part of the scouts because of the religious nature of the organization. Our denomination said they could be in the Boy Scouts if the congregation sponsored the troop and members led all religious activities. When the troop went to Jamborees or other larger gatherings, the troop often skipped the outings. We had similar issues regarding military chaplains.

I decided to dig into the third use of the law in my time of preparation for attending. The issue was stated, "Is there an "usus didacticus," or a teaching use for the law? In Luther's Catechism the purpose of the law was presented as a curb, a mirror, and a rule.

The law as a curb checks sin in the world. The law, written on men's heart says do not kill, and hence there is less murder in the world. This use of the law is not for believers, but for unbelievers.^{vi} Everyone agreed on this.

The law as a mirror shows us our sin so that we turn to Christ for forgiveness and washing.^{vii} No one disagreed here either.

The law as a rule, or a teacher was the conflict. One side said, "If the Son shall set you free, you are free indeed."^{viii} In addition, "We are no longer under law, but under grace."^{ix} Therefore, the law has no more place for Christians. It is no longer a teaching tool because we are free from the law. I agreed with almost everything written from this side of the argument.

Side two said Jesus gave us commands as in love each other. Side one said these were not laws, but gospel affirmations. Side two also said though we were not under the law, the law is a reflection of the things that God wants, and therefore we ought to follow them as a way of pleasing God. We do not steal because God said not to, and He does not like it. Side one said that as Christians you wouldn't do that anyway. I also agreed with almost everything written by side two.

What was the matter with me? Was I double minded? Others were fighting and fussing over this issue. Families were separating because of it. I was comfortable with both sides.

I began to cry out to God for understanding. How could Mac, my Baptist

Pastor brother, and I believe the same thing about salvation? How could I embrace both sides of a doctrinal or semantic debate? God began to instruct me about tension. Every living thing has tension. If there is no tension, there is death. If a teaching or doctrine is alive, there are points of tension. The job of an elder is to present himself to God as an approved workman who rightly handles the word of truth, or as the ancient version says, rightly dividing the word.^x

For me this understanding settled everything. The understanding of tension might be the most important message for those who wish to be peacemakers in the body of Christ. It helps understand the history of the fracturing of the Church and the creation of so many denominations, or franchises. It makes relating to other believers much easier. There is only one Church, and this concept of tension is a powerful tool to that end. There is an entire chapter in the book on tension. This is just relating the circumstances that brought it about.

During this time I came to realize that denominational oversight is an oxymoron. My own experience as a denominational official, and then the experiences noted plus several other cases, made it clear that if you are successful (big membership and contributions), you can do anything you want, but if you are struggling, you have to jump through impossible hoops.

Much of what I was hearing from the Lord was already incorporated in a new movement known as “Shepherding” or “Discipleship.” I stepped into this new and refreshing stream, officially resigning from Christ Lutheran and the Missouri Synod in January of 1978. Now I had a Pastor (Southern Baptist background) who was committed to serving me with counsel, encouragement, correction, and love. There were delights and difficulties, successes and failures, victories and defeats.

There was, of course, the heavy handedness and domination by some that tainted this move of God. I see this same problem throughout the Church at large in various places and movements. Insecure people want to have Gentile authority structures, just like the pre-Pentecost apostles were talking about.^{xi} The requisite need is proper government of the church where the elders walk together in the light in mutual submission. The dominating residue of our old nature raises its head in spite of its death in the waters of baptism.

Most of us thrived in house churches. Everyone had someone to look to as pastor, and all the shepherding units were small and intimate. It was an intense and a wonderful time. We had a Kingdom vision, covenant relationships, and a workable strategy to see Jesus enthroned. We did things together, and began to experience an alternate life-style. Satan, of course, worked hard to sabotage the movement and create division.

This is what I think happened. God dismantled the movement and our community because He loved us and did not want us to denominate. The restoration of accountability and leadership was being worked throughout the Church-at-large, and the leaven needed to disperse.

In addition, I think we made three major mistakes. First, we intimated that there was a special or separate covenant other than the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus. Everything we taught about covenant was true, but we applied it

only to those like us, when in truth the covenant applies to all who break bread and share the cup. Second, we ignored the truth about church-of-the-city, or at least set it aside, while we built our own franchise of committed, covenant, Kingdom relationships. Third, we tried to model successful dynamic communities for the rest of the body of Christ to see and then follow our pattern. We forgot that God has chosen the weak things, the foolish things, the no-account things to confound the strong, the wise, and the mighty.

After the breakup, I gathered the fragments remaining in North San Diego County and started Shalom Christian Fellowship. We continued the same pattern of church life for about a year with the addition of Al Montes's dynamic outreach to Mexican farm-workers. At the end of the year God began making it clear that I needed to step out of leadership, turn the work over to others, write, and work with pastors to bring about church of the city.

Thus began a very intense and different period in my life. With no regular income or savings, only God's incredible provision, I wrote and self-published Ultimate Evangelism, The Church in the Harvest Age, Conditional Love, and Malchus. I opened a Bank Account and used the name, "Frank Smith Ministries." A dear brother and co-worker saw the name and gave me a hard time about it. He had been a pastor of a Unity congregation who met Jesus and began preaching about Jesus and His blood. The denomination asked him to leave. He asked me, "Who do you think you are, Frank Smith Ministries? If it's not the Lord's ministry, it shouldn't exist."

I feebly resisted his tirade with comments about Billy Graham and other leaders doing it, but his words deeply convicted me. So, I changed the name of the ministry to "Crushed Grapes" which to me has the least appeal as a come and get blessed club. The name is appealing only to those who are willing for God to crush them and then pour them out in service to lost people.

One Sunday the congregation where I spoke sang, "Down By The Riverside." It got inside me like never before. I had never paid attention to it or the words, and if I had ever sung it before, I did not remember. I did not realize that the river was the Jordan leading into the Promised Land, or into our eternal reward. I had assumed it was about baptism. While singing, "I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside," I heard the voice inside say, "Don't you dare lay it down before that."

I sang that song for several days and one time while singing loudly in the car, "I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more," I realized with a jolt, I do not study war. I have never studied war and I do not know much about it. Again, I was convicted and began studying war. I avidly read many books on the strategy of war, history of war, and great battles. I devoured again and again Sun Tzu's, The Art of War, and read how Mao Tse Tsung used these principles to defeat Chiang Kai Sheck and turn China into a communist nation.

The application of this warfare emphasis was not the Ephesians chapter six, put on the armor of God business. It was about strategy and tactics for leaders. God's ultimate strategy is to unite all things in heaven and earth under Christ. Our enemy's strategy is to divide and conquer. The most strategic place

of this battle is the city. God is a source of strength for those who turn back the battle at the gates.^{xii} Those at the gates are the elders, and the powerful application of this truth is the unity of the church of the city. When we are one as He is one, the world will believe.^{xiii} This is the ultimate promise of evangelism through unity.

I did seminars on warfare, church government, and evangelism. I preached and ministered at a variety of settings including, Apostolic, Assembly of God, Calvary Chapel, Roman Catholic, Covenant, Baptist, Episcopalian, Foursquare, Independent, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist, Vineyard, Word of Faith, and of course Non-denominational, Inter-denominational, and Anti-denominational. I was torn between love for my brothers and sisters, and dismay at the various containers and systems that held them together. What is this thing we call church?

I also got involved in house church from a little different standpoint that has also helped shape my perspective of church. A man, who had been a young boy in the Lutheran congregation, tracked me down and we met in the mid to late 80's. He brought his second wife; he was her third husband. She had five children from her first two marriages, and he had three by his first. They had a little baby girl from their union. He was out of work and said the Mafia had a contract on his life because he had testified about a former boss. The industry he was in supposedly had many mafia connections. She was very depressed and suicidal, and he had an alcohol problem. We spent an afternoon on our patio and the Lord came in might and power. After some deliverance, prayer, and healing, they left and I promised to stop by their place occasionally.

They lived in a singlewide trailer on a two-acre parcel in one of the roughest areas of Riverside County. It was a good forty miles out of my way. Whenever I stopped by, he fixed an incredible dinner. I always had a message or Bible lesson for them and the children. Soon they invited some neighbors for the meal and service. Then God started blessing them. He landed a good job as a vegetable broker, they upgraded to a very nice doublewide mobile home, then got some horses and built a shop on the property, then a swimming pool (baptismal tank), and we settled in to an every other Friday night meeting that continued for almost fifteen years.

Their place filled up with young people, gang members, bikers, semi-drivers, and neighbors. It was noisy and then got noisier as many were drinking beer and wine. In addition, the smoke got thicker and thicker as the evening wore on. Sometimes I left with a sore throat from all the smoke. Two little old ladies from next door, both in their eighties, would come over and in the course of the meal and service would drink a beer. They were part of a very anti-alcohol denomination, but they liked the beer. If, as often happened, they had a second, or a little wine, several of us would have to help them get home. It was as unruly as the Corinthian meetings^{xiv} and as rich in the gifts and working of God.

One night the hostess interrupted my teaching (almost always happened) with a comment like, "Hey, Frank, I was reading in the Bible about body, soul and spirit. What is this?"

I responded with a thumbnail, Watchman Nee type overview about how

we have physical bodies with various needs just like the animals. We get hungry and eat, tired and sleep, etc. This is the lowest form of our existence. Then we have a soul that consists of mind, will and emotions. This is a higher level of life and most of us have risen above our animal instincts with philosophies, religion, art, music, etc. All of this is soul stuff. But then we have a spirit that is joined with God's Spirit, and it is here that we are to live and rule over our souls and bodies by the spirit He has revived within us."

Without missing a beat, she said, "Wow, we gotta cut out all this shit we're doing." No one laughed. No one thought this language was out of place for a church meeting. Instead most of them responded with their type of "amen," "Yeah, that's right."

One hectic day on my long drive to their place, the religious, pharisaical part of my old nature revived. It had been put to death in the waters of baptism, but it keeps sneaking back into this temple of God and assaulting me. This false me was saying, "This really isn't right. Those people should not be smoking while you are teaching. And they ought to stop drinking then too. The women need to get together and have some regular prayer times and studies. The men should be more blah, blah, blah, blah."

When I pulled up and parked at their home, the still small voice inside spoke, only this time it was not so still and small. "Frank, if you loved those people like I love them, you wouldn't even think like that." I apologized to God, went in and apologized to all of the assembly? fellowship? congregation? saints and seekers? What is this thing we call church?

In 1988 the pro-life movement broke into the forefront of American life. I felt the Lord's direction to get involved in the rescue movement, but keep focused on church-of-the-city. Our goal in Operation Rescue was to lead the Church into repentance through our non-violent protests and blockades of abortion clinics. This resulted in numerous arrests, a lengthy trial and finally forty days in jail. My hope for the unity of the church (one per city) was powerfully renewed during this time, especially in those situations where large numbers of us from various Christian brands and franchises suffered together. I realized that with persecution, God's pattern for church could be quickly realized.

After one dramatic rescue we were made to leave the abortuary by pain compliance which was administered by nun-chucks (illegal) and left in holding tanks at a police substation for about six hours in hand cuffs (declared cruel and unusual punishment and thus illegal). For us Christians those laws to protect criminals evidently did not apply. I was in a holding tank with about thirty men. There was a Presbyterian Pastor, a Calvary Chapel Pastor, two Roman Catholic Deacons, and myself among the "clergy." We had each man tell how he met Jesus. Wow! The room dissolved into a church meeting of deep intimacy with God and each other.

When the police took us out one by one, we could not shake hands or hug as our hands were supposedly cuffed behind our backs. (We had helped each other out of the plastic cuffs by then but slipped back into them before the police came to get us.) All we could do was kiss each other. I thought that maybe all the jail time Paul did helped motivate him to command four times to greet one

another with a holy kiss, or Peter saying to greet each other with a kiss of love.

The fellowship of the brothers back in the denomination had been sweet, because we were a band of brothers, different from all the rest by our doctrinal “purity.” The fellowship in the Shepherding movement was also a deep unity and fellowship. However, the unity I felt that day in 1989 went beyond every other experience of oneness I had ever known. My waning hope for the unity of the church was powerfully resurrected. God’s plan for His one church can and will happen. Suffering and persecution will help it along.

At that time I did my political dabbling with a run for congress as an independent in a district where no pro-life conservative survived the primary. This was much like being baptized in a septic tank. I hope God does not assign a political campaign in the future.

In 1990 we moved back to Orange County, but I felt I should keep an office and presence in the Vista area. I had done Bible studies and chapel services at Green Oak Ranch for a number of years, but the Union Rescue Mission of Los Angeles had begun closing it down. Carl Fielstra received permission from the Board of Directors to re-open it and I struck an agreement with Carl. I would hang around some, and see that a Sunday meeting was held and do the Wednesday Chapel Services in exchange for an office at the Ranch. Thus began a fifteen plus year relationship with the Ranch as the “Consulting Chaplain.”

Over the years at the Ranch, and through the jail experiences I came to believe that many of God’s great and chosen leaders for this exciting time are stuck in prisons, on drugs, in re-habs, or just among the huge and growing homeless population. Satan has seen God’s call on them, and snared them by his insidious methods. There are many stories I could tell about those years, and my continuing ministry with people in recovery. I may sprinkle some throughout this book, but here is a favorite:

Big Rich was working in the kitchen. He had just come from prison a week before. I greeted him with a holy kiss. He said, “Hey Frank I went to the church meeting last Sunday. I’ve never been in a church before. It wasn’t too bad. I think I’ll come back this week. “

At the service the next Sunday there were somewhere around thirty people present – about half from the Ranch and half visitors from the area. I taught from John chapter 1 where John pointed out Jesus and said, “That’s the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. He said it again the next day and two of John’s disciples started following Jesus. He turned to them and asked, ‘What do you want?’” After explaining some of the material in John 1, I said something like, “Jesus is here now and He is asking each of us, ‘What do you want?’”

Then I began to ask individuals as the Spirit nudged me, “George, what do you want?” “Linda, what do you want?” When they said what they wanted, we asked the people around them to lay hands on them and pray for what they wanted from God.

This went on for some time, and then I asked, “Big Rich, what do you want?”

He immediately said, "I want God."

"Praise God," I said, "tell Him that."

"Now?"

"Yes, right now. Pray and tell Him what you want," I said.

"I don't know how to pray. I've never done it."

I said, "You are talking to me. Just talk to him like you're talking to me, and tell him what you want."

"Out loud?"

"Yes, out loud."

Thirty-five year old Big Rich looked up at the roof, raised his right hand, and as he motioned with his hand, said, "C'mon God." It was as if you would call a friend or even a dog, "C'mon God."

And, you know what? God came and God redeemed him and God cleaned him up and has used Big Rich for a number of years in ministry. This was sixteen years ago. Oh, he's had a couple of bumps (head-on crashes) along the road, but he is one of God's leaders for this day. I trust him, and especially I trust Christ in him.

This would probably be a good time to tell you about my name. My older brother was William, my younger brother Guy Robert, and I, Frank Blair Smith III was in the middle. There was only three years and three months between the other two. We were called, "Billy, Buddy, and Bobby." We were extremely close in age, but went our separate ways even as children. Although we liked each other, we did very little together. Bud or Buddy was my name up to the age of thirteen.

We formed a club or gang that later became "the dirty dozen" and I got a new moniker of "Berky." This was my identity all through High School and University. Many family members and very old friends still call me Berky. The change to Frank really began in 1955 when we went to the Seminary. Frank is a "free man." Blair is a "meadow" or often in the middle ages a "battlefield." A Smith is a worker in metals: a forger of swords, shields, spears and weapons of war.

My name means a free man on a battlefield, forging weapons of war. Hallelujah! That is who I am, and that is what I do.

In 1999 Betty and I separated for several years. Our marriage has been bitter/sweet, wonderful/terrible. Many couples do not survive the abortion experience, but we had struggled in different areas from the beginning. I think in some ways we were attracted to each other because we were both damaged goods and somehow (we thought) not a threat to each other.

Betty and Sarah were out of town speaking, and during that time, she called Carl Fielstra and Jim Huber another friend who was working at the Ranch, and asked them to tell me to come and pack my stuff and move out. I was devastated. I did as I was asked, and moved full time to Green Oak Ranch.

Betty said we should meet with a certain counselor, and I was hoping for reconciliation. When we met with him, the first order of business was how much money I would give her per month. I agreed to give her what she said she needed which was most all of my income per month. I thought it was very generous, but was hopeful we could sort this out. The counselor seemed to have

no interest whatsoever in any kind of reconciliation or forgiveness or working with issues.

Just before Christmas, I was eating supper in the dining hall at the ranch and someone came from the kitchen saying the gate had called and I had a visitor coming. The man came walking towards me and I rose to greet him. I did not recognize him, but I don't recognize many people with whom I have had contact in the past. As usual, I greeted him with a holy kiss. He in turn served me with a subpoena as I was being sued for a legal separation. I doubt he has ever had that experience before or since.

Betty hired an attorney. I met with an attorney one time and decided to trust God and resist the process. It was terrible, but God scuttled all the attempts to finalize the separation. My position was that I would continue voluntarily making the payments to Betty, but if she insisted on going through with the separation, I would only pay what the court guidelines required which was about one fourth of the amount I was giving.

We went to court four or five times. The first time was on Valentine's Day in 2000. This was a preliminary thing and I agreed to the judge to continue the payments during the process. However, if the separation was finalized I would only pay according to the much lower guidelines. Four times we were scheduled for trial and each time the judge could not meet or something else intervened. Those were hellish times for me. I would see Betty in the courtroom or in the hall outside and feel the overwhelming emotions. At one of the scheduled trials, I waited in agony most of the day. Finally, they cancelled us because the previous trial lasted too long.

On the drive back to Vista I was complaining to the Lord and asked, "Who else gets treated like this by their wife?"

The clear answer came immediately, "I do." Wow, what is this thing we call church?

After a year or more, Betty finally dropped the trial for a legal separation and we began to have very limited contact. I felt the Lord told me to leave Green Oak Ranch and move to Omaha, Nebraska. I did in 2002. I have always wanted to live in the inner city, and moved into the predominantly black north side. Two disciples whom I had met at Green Oak Ranch joined me in Omaha. One was just out of a Bible School in Texas, and the other had been ministering in Washington State. We experienced this thing we call church as a community for several years, in fact one of the disciples is continuing in Omaha in a different house still in the "hood."

This was a glorious time. Our best meetings were for birthdays of neighborhood friends where we would decorate, buy or bake a cake, have hot dogs or pizza, and celebrate together with Jesus and our friends a Happy Birthday Party. Often these would end with prayer or baptisms. We also held Sunday morning meetings which included lunch. In the winter, we conducted the baptisms in the basement in a kiddy wading pool just big enough to get a person all wet. When the weather warmed up, we moved the tank outside to the driveway where all the neighbors and passers by could witness the proceedings and take note of who was being added to this thing we call church.

During the three years in that particular house, many were touched by the Lord. A number of them were gang members, and all through that time with all the shots fired, we only suffered one bullet hole in the side of the house. In addition, Betty and I began to talk more often on the telephone.

A breakthrough in our relationship happened during August/September of 2003. I was in Taiwan when my appendix ruptured. A Chinese doctor said it was not my appendix, but he took no tests. I got sicker and sicker, but continued the time with my son and family there. I thought I would drown one time in the South China Sea, but managed to survive and even preach in a Taiwanese expression of this thing we call church. I got prayer everywhere, and returned to the States just before the Labor Day Weekend.

My doctor was out of town, and the fill-in scheduled me for tests on the day after Labor Day. Betty came down to visit me in Vista at my friends Jim and Patty Huber's. On Tuesday immediately after the tests I was hospitalized, and surgery was performed on Thursday morning. They removed a large mass of gangrene that had eaten my appendix and part of the colon. The surgeon was amazed that I survived. Betty took off several days and helped nurse me, and we started on the road to reconciliation.

The following month I was up and about some and we held a Crushed Grapes Day in Vista. Betty was with me, and many shared that they had prayed for our reconciliation for years. A trusted sister said that when she prayed about Betty and me she felt the Lord said our relationship was a picture of God and the church – that we were like Isaiah or Ezekiel or Hosea. Those three prophets were living pictures of God and His will for the people.

God told Isaiah to name his sons Shear-Jashub,^{xv} a remnant shall return, and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz,^{xvi} quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil. He said, "Here am I and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion."^{xvii} At least I did not have to run around butt-naked like Isaiah did, even though at times that is the way I felt.^{xviii}

Ezekiel was a living representation from God for the people. He drew a picture of Jerusalem, took an iron pan and placed it between him and the city and lay on his left side for more than a year to bear the sins of the house of Israel.^{xix} Then he rolled over onto his right side and bore the sins of the house of Judah for more than a month.^{xx} He enacted the exile by digging through his wall in the evening, carrying his belongings, and covering his face, "for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel."^{xxi} Perhaps the most difficult message he lived out was the death of his wife without mourning outwardly. In that narrative God said, "Ezekiel will be a sign to you," and "So you will be a sign to them."^{xxii}

Hosea is the most awesome example of the love of God. He is told to marry a prostitute who is a picture of Israel's adulteries against God. After bearing him children, Gomer runs away and returns to her ways. At this point, "The Lord said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.'"^{xxiii} Love is a choice, and God commanded Hosea to choose to love Gomer, just as He chooses to

love us. Hosea is a life giving exploration of the love of God for us, His church. He says of us, "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them."^{xxiv} His anger has been turned on His own Son, that this thing we call church might receive His now unconditional love.

The marriage relationship is the ultimate picture of Christ and the church.^{xxv} As Paul presents this reality in such a powerful way, he very naturally switches from husband and wife to Christ and the church and then has to clarify himself.^{xxvi} Our marriages may be our finest witnessing tool to unbelievers of the love of Christ for His bride as we live out the witnesses of that truth.

Those who know me personally would not make this mistake, but please, no one think that I am the perfect example of Jesus' love and my wife is the errant one. We are a picture of the reconciliation and love that is for all of us in the perfect love of Christ. In that, I am also a part of the body or the bride.

I began spending more time in California than Omaha. Over the Christmas holidays that year, Betty and I both agreed that those were the best days of our then fifty-year marriage. We have now finished several marriage classes and workshops and are still struggling on, trying to live a valid picture of Jesus and His bride, this thing we call church.

Now in our mid-seventies, Betty still works/ministers as a bath aide for the local hospice. She is lovingly serving Jesus and preparing people to graduate into the presence of God. I continue to mentor warriors and leaders, travel, teach and preach, and establish various configurations of this thing we call church.

As with all of us, we live in a forest of activities and responsibilities and are constantly assaulted with a barrage of mind numbing media. There is more to read than any of us read, there is more to do than any of us do, and there is more to see and to experience than any of us have encountered.

It is important to periodically rise above the forest and get a picture from God's perspective of just what is going on. A dear friend and fellow elder, a genuine hero of the recent California wild fires shared about his incredible battle. His property is on the lower slopes of Mt. Palomar. The smoke was so blinding and disorienting, that he periodically had to drive up the mountain to get above the smoke and haze and see where the fire was raging and what part of his and his neighbors' property was in greatest danger. Then with the bigger perspective he would re-enter the fray.

In the following pages about this thing we call church, I pray that the Holy Spirit makes clear those basic principles and concepts that are the heart and mind of Jesus, the one who is actually building his church through us. May our labors not be in vain and when the fire tests our efforts, as it surely must, may the residue be worthy of a reward.^{xxvii}

Chapter Two Tension (Understanding Doctrine)

I have chosen to put Tension before Unity because it affects the way we see all living things. We will deal with this further in the next chapter. It can provide for us a basis and foundation to help in dealing with the brokenness and divisions within this thing we call church. It is a necessary understanding for all who are called to be peacemakers in this day. We can be instruments of healing rather than fearful agitators who insist on our own limited viewpoint.

Are you balanced? I am not. I am rather tipsy and have to watch where and how I walk. Balance is precarious. If you pile enough things on top of each other, they will ultimately fall. If you try to balance yourself on one foot, it is only a matter of time before you topple. We hear a great deal about the need to be balanced, and I think I understand what is being said. But see if this model of tension is not **the** a more natural and better concept.

Every living thing has tension. There are at least two opposing forces in everything that is alive whether it's a part of a living person or organ or teaching or doctrine. My arm works because there are muscles that oppose each other. I could have a very strong front muscle, but if there is not another one on the back side opposing it, I am crippled in that limb and unable to function.

Tension is strong and vibrant. Tension moves and lives and functions. My heart is pumping out the life-source of my blood with tremendous force. My arteries and muscles and skin are pushing it back in the proper channels with a great deal of tension. We measure that tension carefully. If it gets too high, something pops. If it gets too low, everything stops. Proper tension is wonderful. Proper tension is life.

Balance, however, is precarious. When things are balanced, they have to remain quiet and unstirred lest one side or the other fall over. It is like a teeter-totter, or balanced scales; nothing can be added or moved. It is like building a house of cards, or a child's tower of blocks.

Here are a few examples of the points of tension of living doctrines. If it is dead doctrine, there is no tension, only inflexibility and rigamortus. Although we have made doctrine more synonymous with theological precepts, Paul zeroed in on how doctrine was for living, i.e. Titus Chapter 2. Which is it? Is doctrine about concepts and teachings or about how to live? Yes!

The Bible is alive. It is a book that God breathed,^{xxviii} just like He breathed into Adam the breath of life, and he became alive. God is the author who inspired this unique integrated message system. <->The Bible is the work of men who

wrote with their own styles and mannerisms and addressed the specific problems of their day. Well, which is it? Is it written by God or men? The answer is, "Yes!"

The believer has eternal security, safe in the hand of Jesus and no one can snatch him out of His hand.^{xxix} He has been chosen in Christ before the world began, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son^{xxx}. <->The believer must be careful that he doesn't fall,^{xxxi} he must withstand the one who desires to destroy him,^{xxxii} and if he crucifies the Lord anew after tasting of the life of His Spirit he can't even repent any more.^{xxxiii} Well, which is it? Yes!

Baptism is a sacrificial response to the good news of Jesus. It is your personal act of repentance and faith.^{xxxiv} Baptism is the sacramental reception of God's grace and faith which saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.^{xxxv} It is the washing of the water through the word.^{xxxvi} Well, which is it? Is it what you do, or what God does? Yes!

God is one. There is none other God than one. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one."^{xxxvii} <->God said, "Let us make man in our image."^{xxxviii} Baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.^{xxxix} Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."^{xl} Of Jesus the Bible says, "This is the true God."^{xli} Well, which is it? Is God one or three? Yes!

We are justified by grace through faith for Christ's sake.^{xlii} We even maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.^{xliii} <-> Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead; so we see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.^{xliv} Well, which is it? Yes!

Jesus is the eternal Logos, the Word of God Who spoke the worlds into being. He is God of God, very God of very God.^{xlv} <-> He became flesh.^{xlvi} Jesus is the Son of man.^{xlvii} He was born a true man, made to die, bleed, suffer, feel, and be tempted to sin.^{xlviii} Well, which is it? Is Jesus God or man? Yes!

Do you see it? Every living teaching has points of tension. Do not cut them up and kill them. Let them live side by side. Do not compound the problem of religious ignorance and lack of courage.

At this point let us take a lesson from our past. Historically, when the church or a large segment of it gets mired in one of the points of tension, God sends a prophet to proclaim the opposing point. In the fifteenth century, the church was caught up in works and law and buying favor from God. God sent a prophet in the person of Martin Luther, not to divide the church, but to correct the imbalance and restore the understanding of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake. Because of fear, control issues, and the ministry of the evil one, the church was split, the tension was removed, and instead of unity and blessing

there was division and death. Most of the thousands of denominations started this way.

This is what has happened over and over again. In our fear and insecurity, we can't stand the tension. We succumb to fear and the evil one, or the world, or our own flesh, and remove the tension by building a sterile, balanced, unchallengeable doctrine, sealed with the religious dictum, "thus says the Lord." Then, as our position gives off the odor of death, others look for another doctrine. The other pole, or point of tension to our teaching, is "discovered," and since it also comes from the Bible, another sterile, balanced, unchallengeable doctrine is presented with another, "thus says the Lord."

The church (one per city) is now divided and, therefore, cannot withstand the enemy. Satan's strategy to divide and conquer has prevailed. The breach in the wall allows the evil one to come in and out, killing, stealing, and destroying. The elders, called to sit at the gates, now defend their dead doctrines instead of the church. They protect their flocks from the evils of the other doctrines, so now the devil, the ultimate anti-Christ, can come and go through the very gates themselves. What a mess!

The great need for the church is mature elders who are approved workmen that can correctly handle the word of truth, or accurately apply the word of truth, or rightly divide it, and apply the appropriate point of tension to the situation.^{xlix} It is the nature of young men to contend and battle for positions, while the fathers (elders) know Him who is from the beginning.¹

Fellow elders, we are the solution to this problem. Fellow elders, we are also the problem.

Elders, repent; change your way of thinking! Seek God and the other elders of your church (one per city) and get into spiritual formation at the gates. Shut the gates to drugs, pornography, the shedding of innocent blood, hatred, prejudice, and all the forms of wickedness that we have allowed to invade our cities through sin, ignorance, and cowardice.

"Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, the King of glory? The Lord Almighty – he is the King of glory." Psalm 24:7-10

"In that day the Lord Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people. He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate." Isaiah 28:5, 6

“He has set his foundation of the holy mountain; the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.” Psalm 87:1,2

The gates and doors of this thing we call church are the domain of the elders.

Chapter Three

Unity (Division)

There is only one Church!
There is only one Body of Christ!
There is only one Bride for our Lord Jesus!

In all of heaven and earth, there is only one church. On the earth, there is only one church. In the United States, there is only one church. In any state in the union, there is only one church. In every city, there is only one church. Most importantly, in the heart and mind of God there is only one church.

There was only one church when Jesus started it off. There was only one church on the day of Pentecost. There was only one church in Jerusalem, and one in Ephesus, and only one in every city where church was planted. Well then, what is this broken, fractured, separated thing that we call church? Jim Rutz in his wonderful and mind blowing book, Mega Shift makes reference to thirty three thousand, nine hundred and nine denominations.ⁱ How did it shatter so badly? What happened?

We have an enemy who has caused this to happen. There is a war raging between the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness. Although the outcome is determined already, there are many casualties. The battles will continue to be fought until the very end when our King will cast the church's enemy into a lake of fire prepared for him and his angels.ⁱⁱ In this interim time, the devil fights with cunning and deceit to thwart God's purpose and strategy.

God's strategy in this war is to unite all things in heaven and earth as one under Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, God has already accomplished this eternal purpose in Christ Jesus.^{iv} The battle took place on the cross, and when Jesus triumphed and cried "It is finished," the victory was won forever. Our job now is to work out this great salvation and be His servants in the inevitable triumph of the church.

Although Satan is fighting a losing cause, he still fights tooth and nail with viciousness and cunning. He spews a river of filth out of his mouth, much of which comes flowing right into our living rooms and as boobs mesmerized by the tube, we swallow his filth. He is smart and he attacks God's basic purpose. God's ultimate strategy is unity, and Satan's ultimate goal is division. As long as Satan can keep us seeing each other as enemies, he keeps the church impotent and ineffective.

The power of unity.

Even in negative purposes, the power of unity is great. God scattered mankind over the face of the earth and confused their languages at the tower of Babel because, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them."^v If

unregenerate man had the potential for that kind of power from unity, what can we do as the body of Christ?

If we were (when we are) one in the way Jesus, Father, and the Spirit are one, the world would (will) believe.^{lvi} This is the ultimate power of evangelism. If we would follow Jesus' command and truly love one another as He loves us, the people would be drawn to the truth in droves. Our testimony that we are followers of Christ is not our doctrine, our orthodoxy, or our evangelistic fervor. Our testimony is the way we love one another.

Please don't get unity confused with sameness. Unity is not sameness. Sameness is a denial of the uniqueness that God created when He made us and gifted us. If you and I were the same, one of us would be unnecessary. There is no one on the earth who has the same unique combination of gifts and attributes as you. If you withhold those from the rest of us, the body of Christ is impoverished. No one can take your place and do exactly what you can do. You are irreplaceable, loved, and cherished by the head and the rest of us who are joined to Him.

Unity is unique, distinct, divided parts functioning together for the common good under direction.

The Symphony

(Unique, distinct, divided parts, functioning together for the common good, under direction)

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."^{lvii} The Greek word translated "common good" is "sympheron" from which our word symphony comes. The church is like a city-wide symphony orchestra. It is divided into sections featuring strings, brass, woodwinds, and percussion. These are further divided into the violins, violas, bass, and more stringed instruments. I don't know all the names, but I love their sounds when they blend and harmonize with the rest.

Then there is the "brassy" brass of the trumpets. And now we have a problem. The violins think the trumpets are too loud and blaring. The percussionists think the oboes are too boring. The trombones don't like the in and out business of the timpanists. So what has happened to the city-wide symphony is that the drummers all go to Tulsa to meet with other drummers, and drum away. The violins gather in St. Louis, while the clarinets go to Chicago. The piccolos have wonderful gatherings in Seattle, and the pianists prefer the meetings in New York.

Beloved, when the orchestra plays city by city, the world will believe. All will be drawn to the heavenly music. We have been tuning our instruments for a long long time. The Great Conductor is taking His place at the podium and tapping for our attention. The heads of the different sections (Elders?) have to subordinate their leadership to the conductor. If they have done their work well, each individual will follow the Masters lead as they were taught to do.

If we are to play a Concerto in D Minor, and one of the groups of the city church are playing Mary Had a Little Lamb in C, we have trouble. The Mary Had a Little Lamb folks missed the communication the Conductor sent through His

Spirit. There must now be a correction or removal of the out-of-synch group. It is important for the group leaders to walk together in the light with each other (submit) and together govern and prepare the orchestra for the concert.

When the differing sections play their opposing parts, it is pleasing although different. The frilly flute twirls, and the massive drum rolls, and the tuba umpahs, and the electrifying trumpet blasts, all wonderfully fit together under the direction of the leader.

I can see now our Great Conductor with His left hand raised, and His right hand tapping the baton on the podium for attention. We are still doing the last minute tuning and adjusting, but order is beginning to come. All eyes are turning towards Him. The music I am anticipating will eclipse the Hallelujah Chorus. This is the church, the symphony, city by city, at its finest hour.

The Human Body

(Unique, distinct, divided parts, functioning together for the common good, under direction)

I am sitting at the computer typing with my fingers. I quit to scratch my nose which seemed to be itching. I just went to the bathroom, and now I am thinking about getting another cup of coffee or a snack. My stomach feels comfortably full, but I want something hot to drink. I would like to get further along in this writing so I could go get some exercise. My eyes are a bit tired from looking at the monitor, and I am still in my pajamas. Sometime soon I should probably get dressed before I am interrupted by a visitor.

All the while these decisions are being pondered, my heart continues to beat; my lungs take in air and transfer oxygen to the blood passing through. The blood had just dumped a load of waste to the kidneys before making the trip to the lungs. My liver is automatically manufacturing needed chemicals and enzymes, and my immune system is waging a continual battle against invaders of which I am not aware unless they get too much of a foothold and then the body will need extra rest and care.

The dirtiest part of my body is the skin which is also the largest organ. It interfaces with my surroundings which are contaminated with germs and viruses that would kill me if they get in and are not quickly snuffed out. My skin and my brain must be separated for function and purpose, but each must continue to do its work as part of this one body.

The differences and complexities of this body are amazing. Each part has purpose and uniqueness. The parts are clustered together into organs or limbs, or perhaps individually disconnected from organs and limbs as they travel throughout one of the "systems." The nervous system carries electronic messages; the blood system carries nutrients and waste as does the lymph system in ways I do not understand. The most thrilling account of the human body, and thus a textbook on church organization and structure is Fearfully and Wonderfully Made by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey.

The church is not like a body, it is a body. It is the very body of Christ Himself, and the primary expression of this body is the city. It is where the symphony plays. It is the place where the body is complete and whole. The various configurations of fellowships, house churches, etc. are like organs or

limbs, but the body functions city by city. In the mind and heart of God this is a beautiful, healthy, exuberant body of His Son. However, what most of us see with our natural eyes is a broken, crippled, sickly body, just trying to hold on. Which is the proper perspective of this thing we call church?

The concept of tension also applies to the way things ought to be and the way things are. We need accurate assessments of what is, but we must never surrender what should be or could be. We must always hold God's higher point of view while co-laboring with Him in the neediness of now.

God highlights this networking of the body through His servant Paul in 1 Corinthians twelve. He clarifies the giftings and the interrelationships. Then he describes the servants Christ assigns to His body and follows this with the purpose or the way the body is to live. This is, of course chapter thirteen, the love chapter. Then in chapter fourteen, he presents some of the ways this body functions when it comes together in its various configurations. I think the proper order of study for these chapters is: 13,12,13,14,13. This gives the proper emphasis to the most excellent way.^{lviii}

The Marriage Relationship

(Unique, distinct, divided parts, functioning together for the common good, under direction)

There is the marriage relationship of husband and wife presented in Ephesians five and also the intimate portrayal of married love in the Song of Songs. These are a picture of many marriage relationships, but especially depict Christ and His Bride, the church. In Ephesians five it is as if Paul gets confused about who he is talking about. In verse 32 he says this is a profound mystery, and then has to clarify that he is talking about Christ and the church. Immediately, however, he is back to our marriages.

Outside of loving one another, nothing is as powerful a witness for Christ as our marriages. But then marriage also certainly fits in the category of loving one another. This is the new command that Jesus repeated at least three times on the last night of His earthly life. This is our witness. This is how men really know we are followers of Jesus, if we truly love one another. Marriage is an instrument that validates our faith, and is also an effective means for testing that faith.

A woman is unique and distinct from a man. Male and female are as profoundly different spiritually and emotionally as they are physically. For husband and wife to function together in love for the common good is a beautiful wonder to behold. Although Darwin taught that women were both biologically and intellectually inferior to men^{lix} (he was wrong about some other things also) we are different, but of equal worth before God and each other. We each have attributes to complement the other.

When a marriage functions with mutual love, respect, and honor, while each spouse carries out the differing duties, it is a wonder that illustrates this thing we call church.

The Family

(Unique, distinct, divided parts, functioning together for the common good, under direction)

Then there is the family metaphor. Family is God's idea. He invented family, cherishes it, and upholds it as the basic institution of society. As the family goes, so goes everything. Every family on earth derives its name from our Father.^{lx} It is only natural that the church should be referred to as the family of God.^{lxi}

The church is like a large family with grandparents, parents, singles, youth, and children. Each individual in the family is unique and a cherished part. Just like church, the family meets in all types of configurations, the main one being the daily gathering around the table for meals. Then there are holiday get-togethers with various extended members. Sometimes there are celebrations honoring different members for notable birthdays or anniversaries. Periodically many families will gather for a reunion with huge numbers attending from larger distances, something like when our forefathers went to Jerusalem for the feasts. Even those who leave family settings to serve our Master are promised to receive many times more family members even in this life.^{lxii}

The Army

(Unique, distinct, divided parts, functioning together for the common good, under direction)

There is only one army per country and only one commander-in-chief. Each officer and soldier carries out the different assignments and duties according to the plan of the commander. If the staff officers follow their own ideas and disregard the commander-in-chief, they are subject to court martial and could be shot. In this illustration of church, elders would be like the officers, and the enlisted personnel are the rest of the body.

Everyone is in the army. There are no exemptions and no exceptions. Each individual has a part to play. As in one instance of the army of Israel under Jehoshaphat, he appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of His holiness and to go out at the head of the army.^{lxiii} Under David, those who guarded the supplies were to receive an equal share in the plunder, the same as those who were in the battle.^{lxiv} There are no insignificant duties in an army. There are no insignificant members in this thing we call church.

The City

(Unique, distinct, divided parts, functioning together for the common good, under direction)

A city is a bustling community of activity, enterprise, and building. It speaks of a variety of interpersonal relationship, each different, yet each one alive and vital. There is community, the sense of belonging, the common goals and achievements. The city has foundations. The architect and builder is God.^{lxv} "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells."^{lxvi} "Glorious things are said of you, O City of God."^{lxvii}

In this raging war, whose side are you on? That question seems simplistic and much like a cheap shot. We respond, "We are all Christians, we have sworn

our allegiance to Jesus and His church. What do you mean, ‘Whose side are you on?’”

Maybe the question would be better put as, “Which side in this war are you helping the most?” Are you laboring in the Lord to unite all things in heaven and earth under Christ as is His ultimate strategy? Or, are you serving the snake by creating divisions and separations within the church according to his strategy?

In chapter 7, “A Dynamic Organism” we deal with the three levels of growth throughout the Bible and how these affect the dynamics of church activities and programs. In Ephesians chapter four there are three progressive levels of unity presented that mirror many of the same facets of growth.

1. Unity of the Spirit v. 3
2. Unity of the faith v. 13
3. organic Unity v. 16

1. In verse three we are told to keep, work at, fight for, don’t let go of, the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is a spiritual unity among all Christians that already exists even with those of us with serious disagreements. We do not have to create it. We do not have to work to make it happen; we have to work to keep it from fracturing. Those of us who are fathers and understand the reality of tension are especially responsible to see that this unity remains intact.

We are to “make every effort” to keep this unity that exists. Other translations say, “Endeavor,” “Being diligent to preserve,” “Do all you can,” “Eager to maintain,” “Make it your aim,” “Do your best to.” Do you get the picture?

Work hard at this maintenance of unity. It already exists. Put it high on your priorities of life in Christ. Go out of your way to uphold what already is. Don’t try to create it, keep it. It is holy. It is sacred. It is part of living your life worthy of your high calling in Christ.^{lxviii} Holiness is bound up in keeping unity of the spirit wherever it exists in Christ.

Here is how to do it: be humble, gentle, patient, “bearing with one another in love.”^{lxix} There is much “bearing with one another” that needs to be done in love. In case you hadn’t noticed, there are many obnoxious brothers and sisters who are hard to love.

Jesus is the treasure hidden in the field and the field is like this thing we call church. We sell all to buy the field that contains the treasure.^{lxx} The treasure is beyond our highest dreams and expectations. Jesus is our portion and great reward. He is the bright and morning star. Jesus is our fullness that fills all in all. But the field is a mess.

The field is full of junk in various stages of decay and renewal. In some sections the field is littered with beer cans and cigarette butts. Other parts have mountains of pamphlets and flyers condemning everyone and everything. Religious artifacts are strewn here and there, and every so often there is a pile of “donkey heads and doves dung.”^{lxxi} Someone is usually defending the pile, as if it rivaled the treasure, or the treasure depended on these things that remain after the Spirit has moved on.

I once heard O.A.Waech, a beloved Lutheran evangelist say, “The church is like Noah’s Ark. If it wasn’t for the storm outside, you couldn’t stand the stink inside.” Amen. Get over the smell, and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

2. Verse thirteen says we will come to the unity of the faith. We are certainly not at that point now, but this passage assures us, we will get there. There is only one faith (v5) and this is the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ delivered to the saints. In heaven there is perfect unity of faith now. It will manifest itself here, but it is not evident yet. As I mentioned in chapter one, the denomination in which I was trained said that we had to start with the unity of faith. If we did not have a like faith, we were not to seek or affirm any unity of the spirit. I realize my past denomination was one of the strictest on this matter, but I think denominations are all the same in requiring allegiance to some pet doctrines or teachings, some practice unique to that group, or some special experience before you can truly have unity of the spirit. I believe the essence of this separation is working for the snake’s kingdom to foster and promote division.

We tend to interchange faith with doctrine. We use the term doctrine to mean a teaching – a truth clearly taught in the Scripture. We make lists of doctrines and require intellectual assent to them as a basis for fellowship in “our church.” We call these lists Confessions, Articles of Faith, Statements of Belief, and more recently, Mission, Vision or Purpose Statements. We convey a sense of great importance on our teachings through these titles.

A doctrine or teaching cannot legitimately be separated from life. All that Jesus taught He first did. All his teaching came from life. We have no doctrine that we don’t live.

If I say, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” and do not forgive others I am lying. If I take various teachings or doctrines and make them abstract intellectual propositions, I am creating a Gentile religious system that snares people into sophistry.

Jesus is not pleased with the words, “Lord, Lord” when they are not accompanied by the deeds that go along with it.^{lxxii} Doctrine and life must agree.

Jesus warned His disciples about the teaching of the Pharisees,^{lxxiii} but He also told them to do what they tell you, but not according to their deeds.^{lxxiv} If I understand this correctly it means what they said was right, what they did was wrong, therefore watch out for their doctrine.

So the second level of unity of faith cannot be separated from life. My doctrine comes from what I say when it is validated by what I live. When doctrine is separated from life it becomes sophistry that follows the example of the Pharisees.

Also, doctrine cannot be removed from the larger body of truth. Remember, all truth is in tension. If it is static, without opposing forces, it is dead. This thing we call church needs deliverance from dead doctrine.

When a champion rises up and proclaims truth, the message is dynamic and alive because it comes in the context of a whole body of truth. This is the process of restoration, or bringing to the body the needed tension.

Truth out of balance or without tension is heresy. Fresh, dynamic revelation is not new, it is a gift from God to bring things back into proper harmony. There is nothing new under the sun.^{lxxv}

When the body gets stuck on works, God sends His servant to proclaim faith. Well then, which is true? Is it justification by works or justification by faith? Bad question.

Of course we are justified by works. Doesn't James say, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone?"^{lxxvi}

Of course we are justified by faith. Doesn't Paul say, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law?"^{lxxvii}

Either of these positions can become a separated group, or a named (denominated) movement. Instead of getting locked into a portion of the doctrine or teaching of justification, take the whole thing, and take it in tension. It is alive. It is vibrant. It is dynamic. It is like a pendulum.

A pendulum has its extreme positions. Without the way out extremes it doesn't work. A pendulum also has dead center. If it stays there, it's dead.

Before we end this section on the unity of faith, let's look at the adversaries approach to divide us. According to Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James, those who divide the church (are):

Godless

Change the grace of God into license for immorality

Deny Jesus Christ

Dreamers

Pollute their own bodies

Reject authority

Slander celestial beings

Speak abusively against whatever they do not understand

Follow their instincts like unreasoning animals

Take the way of Cain

Rush for profit to Balaam's error

Destroyed in Korah's rebellion

Blemishes at your love feasts

Shepherds who feed only themselves

Clouds without rain

Autumn trees without fruit and uprooted – twice dead

Wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame

Wandering stars

Ungodly doing ungodly acts in ungodly ways

Speak harsh words against the Lord

Grumblers

Fault finders

Follow their own evil desires

Boast about themselves

Flatter others to their own advantage

Scoffers

“These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.” Jude 19 Which side are you on?

It is disgustingly easy to stop listening to the Spirit and follow our own religious ways and thinking. We train our leaders to be wise and smart and knowledgeable. The men on the above list followed their own natural instincts. Natural instincts are the instincts of natural man; it is the assessing of everything by the knowledge of good and evil. “No human can correctly distinguish good from evil regardless of their spiritual state, knowledge of scripture, or experience. Our only capacity to form such a judgment comes from the *sarx*, and the *sarx* is always wrong. This seems so simple that it is hard to believe.”^{lxxviii}

3. The third level of unity is organic; it is the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, growing and making increase of itself in love as each part does its work.^{lxxix} The church at this highest level of unity is an organism; it is a living, breathing, functioning body. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

The Body of Christ is alive. God is pleased. The church begins to turn in on itself with excellent educational programs, nurturing events that inspire and build up the saints. The elders do a good job in leading to green pastures and still waters.

God is pleased to send some prophets. “Thus says the Lord, ‘I did not tell you to stay. I said go! Go and make disciples. Go and compel them to come in.’ Church, if you don’t hear the word of the Lord and repent, and change your ways, God will come and scatter you among the nations.” Isn’t it great? Then comes the Evangelists and the gift of evangelism working in the people.

This thing we call church at this organic level thrives and teems with ever changing life. God is pleased. The people love Jesus. “The Lord is my shepherd.” The personal relationship with Him deepens, and then people begin to act out the extreme, “It’s me and Jesus.” The relationships within the body suffer, and the good becomes rebellion.

God is pleased to raise up prophets. Biblical principles are sounded loud and clear. Discipleship. Shepherding. Authority. Submission. Accountability. Plurality. The leaven begins to work throughout the body. Isn’t God good?

Naturally every extreme by itself without the whole truth is wrong. It is terrible when restorative truth is isolated and then separated from the rest of the body. That makes it die. It must have the rest of the truth. Each part of the body needs the other parts. The whole truth includes the extreme positions.

When a truth is being restored, it becomes a rallying cry for the reformers. It is an invitation to come. “All who believe this come on in.” Later, if the movement denominates and fragments and separates from the rest of the church, the rallying cry becomes a harsh doctrine that says, “Stay out if you don’t believe this.”

Every living (organic) doctrine or teaching is in tension as a part of the whole truth. Every truth has appropriate applications to specific situations. The crying need today is for mature elders walking in mutual submission who know how to correctly handle, or rightly divide, or appropriately apply the word of truth.^{lxxx}

All right, what does this organic thing we call church look like? Jesus. How does it act? Like Jesus. What does this body do? The works of Jesus.

Chapter Four The Word Church (Ekklesia)

The word "church" is the mistranslation of the Greek word ekklesia. This word in Greek consists of the prefix "ek" meaning out of, and "kaleo" which means call. The ekklesia is the people who have heard the good news (gospel) and been called out of the world and into Christ. The ekklesia is the alternate society that is purposed and destined to fill the earth with the glory of God.

The ekklesia is always people, never a building. The ekklesia is always people, never an organization. The ekklesia is always people, never a system. The ekklesia is always people.

The ekklesia is Jesus' Church. No other person in the Bible has a church. Even the reference from Acts 7:38 about the church (ekklesia) in the wilderness refers to the One like Moses who was there with the church. Of course He was. It was His Church. It was Jesus.

The word "ekklesia" is used 115 times in the New Testament. Three times it has nothing to do with what we think of as church. These three references are in the book of Acts and they refer to the "assembly" of the City of Ephesus during the Acts 19 riot. These were the people rioting against the Christians and they were called, "ekklesia."

Here is, in my opinion, the way the other 112 times "ekklesia" is used as the people of God:^{lxxxix}

81, The Church in the City.

16, The Universal Church.

10, Gatherings as a Church: I Corinthians 11:18 and I Corinthians 14 type meetings. These could be larger, even citywide meetings, but I suspect they were flock or congregational meetings. I think I Corinthians 14 type meetings had somewhere around 50 people participating.

4, The Church that meets in someone's house. Twice it refers to Priscilla and Aquila's house, once to Nympha's, and once to Philemon's.

1, The church in the wilderness from Acts 7:38 mentioned above.

On This Rock

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'

They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, (Petros) and on this rock (petra) I will build my church, and the gates of

Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ ²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.”^{lxxxii}

Using this scripture, Roman Catholicism says, “The Church is built upon Peter, the first Pope.” Many Protestants (those who protest the papacy) say, “The Church is built on Jesus Christ. Peter had just confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. The rock on which the church is built is actually Peter’s confession of Christ. Jesus is the rock.” Both interpretations are misleading and seem religious to me.

Here is my literal translation of verse 18, “You are Rocky, and on this rock I will build my church.” Paul says we are members of God’s household “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.”^{lxxxiii} This glorious building is made up of living stones. Peter, the apostle, is the first foundation stone. And, like all of us, he is a cracked and broken vessel. There is no other kind of stone for this building. Actually the more cracked and broken we are, the more the light can shine out through us. Rocky Jonahson was the first of us in this church. He was restored to his calling by the cornerstone; kept true by the cornerstone, kept in right alignment by the cornerstone, and kept in right relationships by the cornerstone.

It is ridiculous to “cover his humanity” with a pompous clerical robe, or to minimize his humanity by making his “confession of faith” the rock. It is Peter the fisher of men; Peter the great at opening mouth - inserting foot; Peter the water-walker; Peter who opened the door of faith to the gentiles at Cornelius’ house. Peter the one we fall in love with when we read the gospels. The church is people, and Peter is a huge and most appropriate primary foundation stone on which Jesus is building His church.

We are all “living stones” set together and growing as this holy temple unto the Lord. In Him, we are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.^{lxxxiv} Apostles and prophets, like Peter, are often underground workers whose chief concern is foundations.

The Building

Jesus said, “I will build my church.”^{lxxxv} Some, not to be outdone by anyone, start nailing boards and cementing stones and say, “my church,” or “our church.” The materials of Jesus’ building are living stones, joined by apostles and prophets with Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. It is a building or temple of people who are a dwelling place for God. “Our church” is built on the foundation of the city’s building code, blessed and authorized by Caesar through a “501 c 3” status, with the chief cornerstone being the division or separation of “our church” from every other “church.”

Many who start building a church according to their own notions and ideas have good intentions, very noble aspirations, and tremendously high ideals. They

are much like Uzzah when he conscientiously reached out to steady the Ark of the Covenant. God would have none of Uzzah or David's high ideals that day and struck this champion dead on the spot.^{lxxxvi} There were prescribed ways to handle the Ark. No other good ideas were acceptable. Jesus retains the commission to build his church, and we must hear clearly and act in obedience.

The living stones are the only building that is rightly called church.^{lxxxvii} All physical buildings are tools for the church to use. If we begin to call these buildings a church, we are making them high places. A high place is any place that is considered holy just because it is assumed to have some special aura or efficacy. There were many "high places" in Israel when God's people came into the land. God said to destroy them all.^{lxxxviii} They did not do it.

The most important high place was at Gibeon where God met with Solomon.^{lxxxix} God commended Solomon for his devotion and love, except that, he offered sacrifices at the high places.^{xc} Samuel also used a high place in Bethlehem which included a kitchen, a cook, and room for at least thirty people to be seated for a meal.^{xcii} So God actually used these places at times, just like He uses high places today. When revival broke out during the times of the divided kingdom, the indication of how deep the revival went was whether or not they destroyed the high places.

The next wave of buildings was the synagogues. These were multi-functional community centers as well as places to gather for Sabbath assemblies. They originated in Babylon, and just like the high places, God used them. Jesus even taught in them regularly, but He also said his followers would be flogged in them.^{xciii}

Today, God lives in His people, and whenever we gather, church is in session. Wherever we gather, church is in session. However we gather church is in session.

Okay then,
how did we get stuck with the word "church"
instead of congregation or assembly or fellowship?

In Greek, "Kyrios" means Lord. In the New Testament, Kyrios is the Lord Jesus. Kyriakos is concerning a Master or Lord. Kyriakon is the Lord's house. Kyriakon became "circe" or "kirk" in Anglo-Saxon, and then "chirche" in Middle English. From this comes our word "church." Kyriakon and ekklesia are used in the same verse in 1 Timothy 3:15, which says, "...in God's household (kyriakon) which is the church (ekklesia) of the living God" This means God's house is the people.

The history of Bible Translations shows the conflict. Some clerics began to use derivatives of kyriakon for ekklesia from about 300 AD onward. Wycliffe and Tyndale, the excellent early English translators, translated ekklesia as "congregation" in every instance. When the clergymen got the upper hand, they changed that to "church."

The clergymen who put together the King James Version relied on

Tyndales translation for about 90% of the text. The 10% changes were, in my opinion, slimy and self-serving. These men were for the most part Anglican Clerics, who tried to validate their system by twisting the meaning of certain words. The first mistranslation was “church” for ekklesia or congregation. This allowed them to refer to their gorgeous and ornate buildings as “churches.”

Their second spin for political correctness, kissing up to the Monarch, the Archbishop, and Bishops, was to translate the word episkopos as “Bishop.” This Greek word also consists of two parts, “epi” upon or over, and “scope” to watch or see. It is an overseer or guardian. This word describes every parent who watches over their children, every teacher who watches over his class, every boss who leads his workers. In the New Testament this overseeing is one of the two responsibilities of every elder. More on this later.

The third mistranslation of those clerics who did the KJV is the worst, and also has a negative effect on this thing we call church. It is, I believe, inexcusable. It has opened the door to great harm and offense to God. This is the rendering of “Passover” in Acts 12:4 as “Easter,” the name of a pagan, pornographic, whore goddess. Please see Appendix B for an article on the “E” name.

I am at a loss whether to stop using the word “church” altogether or just encourage other leaders to have an understanding of this corruption. One of the purposes of this book is to help clarify the issues. Some battles are to be fought at another time, and some are probably not to be fought at all. I have not heard clearly about this specific battle, and so will probably continue to use the wrong word, “church” for ekklesia until I hear the trumpet call.

I will, however, never again use the name of the pornographic whore goddess to refer to the great victory of our Champion over death, and I have stopped validating the clergy system by avoiding the title “Bishop.” Many scholars believe this clericalism is the Nicolaitan sin of Revelation 2:6 and 15. This especially gets my goat when others refer to me as “bishop,” which a few are wont to do.

What about using the word “church”
for a denomination?

It is also inappropriate to use the word “church” for a denomination or franchise. At best, denominations are para-church organizations that keep various parts of the church in the city true to their function. For example all “Praescalopians” meet with other “Praescalopians” to keep the “Praescalopian” heritage thriving. This is like stomachs meeting with other stomachs in order to encourage one another to be good stomachs. That’s acceptable, but the stomach must function with the other parts of the body. The “Praescalopians” are first of all part of the church of that city.

So in one sense denominations are containers to hold and preserve the

uniqueness of a portion of the body. But in another sense, they are prostitute systems that divide the church in the city. Therefore, it is unwise to use the term “church” for such a system.

The various configurations of church.

The church (ekklesia) is always people. There is only one church in any given place. The universal church is the church in heaven and earth, separated by only a thin veil. The church on earth is the people who are joined to Jesus on the earth. There is only one church on earth, or in any other geographical designation of the earth. “Church is used 16 times in the New Testament referring to the Universal church.

81 times the Bible refers to the church of the city. This is the primary use of the word, and the normal, typical, standard expression for the local church, or the church in the locality. Smaller groupings are also called church, but the place of government and function and wholeness is the citywide church. In fact the Bible could be called a tale of two cities: Babylon and Zion. Both exist in the same city, and the battle rages everywhere for the lives of each person for whom Jesus died. Are they part of Zion, or lost in captivity in Babylon? Zion, the city-church, is the church that has elders with the authority to sit at the gates and rule. The fact that we seldom use the word church in this biblical manner is a clear indication that we are more interested in our own ways rather than what the Bible says.

Congregations or assemblies are also referred to as churches in the New Testament. 10 times the reference are to what we would call a fellowship. 4 times it is a house church, or church that meets in someone’s house. These are valid “churches” but they are not the unit of completeness. They are like organs or limbs in a body; or instrumental sections in a symphony; or flocks that together make up a fold. Shepherds (pastors) lead each flock and together with the other elders rule or govern the church in the city. A shepherd may have primary responsibility for the flock entrusted to him by Jesus, but he is to be in mutual submission to all the elders of the city that guard each other and the flock.^{xciii}

When you gather as church in your home, either as one family or as a house church, that is a valid meeting of part of the church of your city. It is as legitimate as any other church gathering whether it numbers 100, 1,000, or 10,000.

Finally then, this thing we call church is first and foremost the church of the city. The word is used and misused in many ways. It is legitimately used for congregation, fellowship, assembly, meeting, gathering, get-together, and especially church of the city. It is never proper to use the word for a building, a denomination, or anything other than people.

Chapter Five Church Government

King Jesus

Government is the means by which the will of God is made known and carried out in the earth, through the church.^{xciv} The true form of government throughout the earth and the world is a kingdom or benevolent dictatorship. Jesus, Mary's Boy, the One like us who came from Nazareth, is the absolute ruler of everything. Jesus rules the world for the church. Jesus rules the world through the church.

Church government is the means of bringing the will of Jesus to the different levels or expressions of church. There are some trans-local servants that help with this, but the seat of church government is the local church (one per city), where the elders govern. The local church is not a single flock or congregation or house church. The local church is the church in the locality, or the church in the city.

In the New Testament, under the Lordship of Jesus, there are three forms of church government: hierarchical, local church (city church), and the individual leading of the Holy Spirit. All three of these types are working together in the biblical account of the choosing of the deacons,^{xcv} and in the appeal to Titus.^{xcvi} As is the case with almost all truth, the divided church has separated these three forms and pitted them against each other.

It is the will of God for the church today to be governed by Jesus Christ through these three forms of government. The three are to function together, and not separately. The tension of the three keeps life and protection in the church.

The hierarchy is the apostles and prophets. It is not denominational officials, although some of them may well be called to be apostles or prophets. The local church form of government, or the voice of the church, is the elders body functioning as the governors of the church of the city. The individual leading of the Holy Spirit is the witness of the Spirit to each person.

Fivefold Ministry

Ministry is service or labor for the Master at His direction with His gifts. All God's people are ministers. There is no separate class of ministers and non-ministers. All are called to ministry and the ordination into ministry is baptism.

Jesus has given some special gifts to His church to help us in our ministries (everyone has a ministry). These special gifts are Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, and Pastor/Teachers, or Pastors and Teachers. These ascension gifts are to prepare us for our ministry.^{xcvii} We are eagerly to desire the greater gifts, namely apostles and prophets.^{xcviii}

Evangelists proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and usher us into the Church. Pastors care for and feed us. Teachers instruct us. Prophets make course corrections and proclaim what time it is, what God is calling for. Apostles keep it all together, or in this day, put it together – set the church of the city in order.

Elders

Every elder is a gift from Jesus to the church. He is also a combination of one or more of the above ascension offices. When an elder is in the local church (city), he typically functions as any other elder. When he goes out (through the gates) he goes according to his special gifting or calling.

We need to give special attention to elders as the Lord has put this high on His agenda. As the church is set in order (one per city), and ministry is released, it is imperative that the elders begin to function according to the pattern set by God.

Leaders rule over people in the world systems. It is not to be that way among us.^{xcix} Elders wash feet or toilets, count others more important, take bum raps, accept punishments they don't deserve, ascend to their office by suffering, and have learned more than most to stop trying to save their lives.

The Greek word “presbyteros,” translated elder first means older. The elders should be the older men and women who have faithfully walked with Jesus longer than most. They have lots of experience for the youngers to draw from. God, however, has seen fit to place young men in this position at certain times and situations.

Elders are governors. In heaven, twenty-four elders sit on the thrones around the throne of God. During the Old Testament Theocracy, the elders ruled the city, sitting at the gates and judging. God ruled through the elders. There was no king, except Jesus, and that name had not as yet been revealed. Elders are rulers.

The Apostle Peter writes to the elders as a fellow elder.^c He highlights the two aspects of the elders' job: shepherd and oversee. The word for shepherd (pastor in Latin) includes nurturing and care as well as feeding. It is the work that a good shepherd does with his sheep. The word for overseer is a combination of epi (upon or over) and scope (see or watch). It is wrongly translated as bishop in the ancient King James Version, but most modern translations correctly translate this “overseer.” An elder, then, is an older ruler who shepherds and oversees.

The Apostle Paul describes the same two facets of an elder when he gathered the elders from Ephesus at Miletus.^{ci} Both overseeing and shepherding are included in one verse, with the important addition that the elders were to guard each other. This will be dealt with more extensively in the next chapter, “Lessons from Ephesus.” Elders are to be in mutual submission to each other, and to walk in the light with each other.

This is how elders might function together in governing the local church (city). An issue is raised by one of the elders, or by a visiting prophet, apostle, etc. The elders collectively seek the Lord to know His mind and will. After

inquiring of the Lord, each elder speaks his heart and mind without interruption. He says what he believes God is saying and what God wants accomplished. Beginning with the youngest, everyone must speak. (This is called the Sanhedrin method, and it keeps the younger men from being intimidated by the older elders and apostles.)

Then a lead elder, like James of Jerusalem, speaks forth the will of the presbytery. If all agree, each elder who has primary responsibilities for portions of the flock, implements the will of the church in his sphere of influence. If there is disagreement, everything waits until they can all say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."^{cii}

Each individual member of the presbytery and each member of the church must respond to the leading of God's Holy Spirit.^{ciii} Each person must also follow the example of their leaders and submit to God's authority.^{civ} Do not remove the tension this causes. Thank God for the tension.

Equipping

The work of the elders is to equip all Christians for their ministry.^{cv} One of the most unfortunate errors in numbering chapters and verses in the Bible was separating Ephesians 4:11 from 4:12. The job of the elders is to prepare all God's people for their ministry. The finest explanation I ever heard for this was from Robert Fitts. He was teaching on these verses in Mexico and asked the Lord about it. He heard something like, "It's simple, Robert. It's like a car. It has two motors, a big one and a little one. Your job is to get the big one started."

In this thing we call church, there are servant leaders, but no professional class. There are fathers and mothers who nurture, and oversee to bring all the children to adulthood and maturity. There are no professional fathers and mothers, or perhaps it could be said, that all the fathers and mothers are professionals, and all the children are to grow up to be professionals. The clergy/laity distinction is not valid and should be discarded, in this thing we call church.

Chapter Six Lessons from Ephesus

The City of Ephesus sat like a crown jewel at the mouth of the Meander River. Wealth and luxury oozed out of its buildings and surroundings. It was a world center of trade. It was the world capital of the slave trade from about 100 BC to 100 AD. Estimates of its population at its height run from a quarter million to 500,000. About half were free citizens of Rome, and the other half slaves. The main road from the harbor led to the massive theater, which held 24,000 spectators, although some estimates, such as Wikipedia's, put the occupancy at 44,000 - the size of most major league baseball stadiums in America.

Into this bustling Metropolis Paul arrived at the end of his second missionary journey. He was returning to Antioch, but stopped in Ephesus for only a few days. He reasoned with the Jews in the Synagogue, who asked him to spend more time with them. He declined but said, "I will come back if it is God's will."^{cv} However, he did leave behind Priscilla and Aquila, his fellow tentmakers and church planters.

During this time, Apollos came to Ephesus. He was well educated, knew the scriptures well, and taught accurately about Jesus. However, he only knew the baptism of John. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him in the Synagogue, "they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately."^{cvii} Apollos then went to Corinth and helped the brethren there. Paul was now on his third missionary journey and came to Ephesus from the interior for his second visit.^{cviii}

On his arrival he encountered some disciples and immediately cut to the crux of the matter. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They responded that they didn't even know there was a Holy Spirit. They said they were baptized into John's baptism and Paul had them baptized again in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then he laid his hands on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all for this Ephesian type repeat of the outpouring of Pentecost. Now behold what God did through another group of twelve Spirit-filled men led by a fiery apostle.

For three months Paul spoke boldly in the Synagogue, and argued persuasively about the Kingdom of God. This may have been a record amount of time in a Jewish Synagogue before Paul was rejected and expelled. How many came to faith?

Paul left the Jews, took the disciples, and had daily meetings or discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on every day for two full years. It even says, "All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." How many believers were there now?

In Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 responded to the Spirit's invitation and died in the waters of baptism. Here is a place where the Pentecost outpouring was replicated, and then for two years the message was proclaimed daily and validated by signs and wonders. The Christians began taking

handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul to the sick and the sick were healed and delivered. How big did this church get?

One of the Jewish Chief Priests named Sceva had seven sons who tried to get in on this action with the demon possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."

One time the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you?" Then the possessed man overpowered all seven of them, beat them until they ran from the house naked and bleeding. Everybody heard about it, and everybody got real serious about God. The name of Jesus was honored. Many who had believed now came forward in repentance and confessed their wickedness. Many had practiced sorcery and brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly.

How big is this church? They calculated the value of the scrolls and the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. A drachma was a silver coin worth about a days wages. How much is this? In our Southern California area, you can hire a day laborer for about \$100.00 or \$10.00 an hour for ten hours. The hourly estimate to live in this area, pay rent, buy food, drive a car, etc. requires \$25.00 or more. Eight hours at \$25.00 is \$400.00 per day. Using those two figures for the value of a day's wage, we see that this huge bon fire consumed at least five million dollars worth of stuff, but more probably, it was twenty million dollars worth.

Just try to picture a twenty million dollar bon fire. How much uproar did this cause? What did the rest of the people in Ephesus think? How many of them had publicly identified with Jesus in the waters of baptism after these two miracle filled years? My estimate is that the church of Ephesus had at least twenty or thirty thousand members. It was a huge mega-church even in our thinking.

The rest of Acts 19 deals with the incredible riot. Demetrius, a silversmith, stirred up the whole city. They went en masse into the 24,000 seat theater, dragging Paul's traveling companions. The Christians were salt and light in a city that loved its pornographic goddess and the money and tourism she brought. The believers were a threat and an irritant as well as the examples and issuers of the invitation to a new life in Christ.

After the riot and things settled down, Paul started on his journey again after a two plus year hiatus. He went as far as Corinth, and stayed three months in Greece. Again, a plot on his life sent him back the way he came. He met with the disciples along the way strengthening and encouraging them. At Assos, Paul joined Luke and the others and boarded a ship to Jerusalem.

Ephesus was a natural place to stop, but Paul wanted to get to Jerusalem, if possible, by Pentecost. He knew that he could not stop in Ephesus for only a few days, so they sailed past Ephesus to near-by Miletus and called for the elders of the church to meet him there. Remember this church at Ephesus was a mega-church. Paul's letter to them includes no personal references, I think this is because there were too many to begin naming them. In contrast, the beautiful sixteenth chapter of the letter to Rome contains twenty-eight greetings by name, plus brothers, families and saints. Had he stopped in Ephesus, the sheer

numbers of saints would have delayed him or broken his heart as they too would have pleaded for him not to go to Jerusalem.

Paul's exhortation to them is recorded in Acts 20:18 – 38. He reminded them of his ministry, told them he would never see them again, challenged them to faithfulness, and gave them an exhortation in verses 28 – 31 that sets the standard for the way the elders are to function and govern:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!”

The first command is, “Keep watch over yourselves,” or, “guard each other.” Elders are first to take care of each other, guard one another, love each other, be honest with one another, submit to each other, confront one another, protect each other, and then do the same for the flock. It is like the instructions given on an airplane in case there is trouble and the oxygen masks drop down. First get your mask on correctly, and then help your children or companions. Elders, first take care of each other.

Notice that Paul does not say something like, “We will send representatives from Jerusalem or Antioch to direct your affairs.” Nor, “We will establish a network throughout the region where you can relate with people of like mind and doctrine.” These leaders, who knew each other well, who lived in the same city, who functioned in the same church, were to govern by keeping their relationships with each other clean, and in the light, and in the truth.

The second command is to “Keep watch over the flock.” This is the church of Ephesus, or the congregation of Ephesus, or the fellowship of the saints in Ephesus. There is only one church, one congregation, one fellowship. It must have met in many homes, parks, places like the school of Tyrannus, but it was only one. It must have gathered in a myriad of configurations, but there was only one church of Ephesus, governed by Jesus through His elders.

The next gleaning from this scripture is that this is the Holy Spirit's doing. He made these elders overseers of the one church. The Holy Spirit put them into this office, or position of leadership. It is not a concocted system of education, or political largesse, but the appointment of God Himself. It is good to desire to be an elder,^{cix} but it is the Holy Spirit's decision who becomes an “older” in the church.

Now we see clearly delineated, the two functions of the elders. These elders are overseers and shepherds of the church of God. It is not their church; it belongs to God. He bought it with His own blood. The elders are His servants, His stewards who oversee and shepherd the one flock.

Overseer is made up of two words in Greek: “epi” which means over, and “scopos” which means to scope, or watch, or see. Therefore, an overseer is the one who watches over, as the monitor for the children's outing, or the foreman at the job, or the teacher in a class, or the parent with the family. This is the first duty of the elder in relationship to the one church.

The second function of every elder is to be a shepherd for the sheep. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and Overseer. Each elder is an under shepherd who represents the Lord in relation to the church. The work of a shepherd can be gleaned from Jesus re-instating Peter as a shepherd in John 21. He tells Peter to feed His lambs. The word for feed here means to find a place for and to graze the lambs. His second shepherding duty was "Take care of my sheep," this from the word that literally means be a shepherd to. And, the third duty re-iterated the word for graze and find a place for the little sheep.

Psalm 23 summarizes this work of every elder being a shepherd or pastor who represents Jesus.

*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever."*

Here are the pastoral guidelines for the elders. Follow the pattern of Psalm 23 for the flock. Provide from God green pastures and quiet waters. Restore the souls of the burdened. Guide in right paths for Jesus' sake. Lead the sheep through the valleys. Do not push them or send them. Go ahead of them and protect them as Jesus did with the power of his name. Prepare a banquet for them right in the midst of the warfare; anoint them with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which is already theirs. The blessings overflow, now and forever.

The word "pastor" is the Latin for shepherd. We have magnified, mystified, and almost deified this title and made it a separate office that is not biblical or wise. Every elder is a pastor/shepherd. No elder, pastor/shepherd, ever functioned alone. They are a part of this group that is first to guard the other elders. The functioning of elders in their giftings as apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher is dealt with elsewhere.

The above verses make it crystal clear; no one "has a church." The church, one per city, belongs to God. We mentioned this above, but let's clarify it here and emphasize the importance of it. Jesus paid the price of His blood to buy the church. It is also called His Body. He said, "I will build my church." This

church is built by Jesus, run by Jesus, and grown by Jesus. The elders are His delegated servants, who watch each other, hear the voice of Jesus, oversee and shepherd the flock so they also may hear the voice of the Lord and join in the battle.

Paul prophesied to the Ephesians elders what was going to happen: Savage wolves would come in and ravage the flock, and even worse some of those very elders would distort the truth to draw disciples after themselves. This is the process that has been going on for 2,000 years. This is how we got the thirty three thousand plus denominations in this one church.

It is time, beloved, to get it back to what was (one church per city), and go on in Him unto His purposes.

God's strategy: unite all things in heaven and earth in Christ
Satan's strategy: divide and conquer.

...

Chapter 7 A Dynamic Organism

The true ekklesia is a growing, changing, dynamic organism. It never stays the same lest it become stagnant and dies. It is a body. Our bodies change and grow and are ever correcting and healing themselves. We are fearfully and wonderfully made with an immune system that throws off disease and attacks invaders. God made us to replace the cells as we go along. I understand we replace them faster than they die until about the age of thirty when they begin to die faster than the replacements. In this body we call church, the cells have been dying off for two thousand years, but they are continually replaced with ever more new cells.

An interesting thought is that my body has been completely replaced several times over the years, yet I still carry some scars and deformities that have marked me for over sixty years. Is this true of the Body of Christ? Do we as an assembly still carry the scars of Jesus? Is the ever changing, growing body of Christ like its head, the same yesterday, today and forever?

The church is comprised of people of all ages who all have different needs and responsibilities. The Bible presents three ages or three stages of growth in a variety of parables and metaphors. Jesus told the parable of the growing seed. "All by itself the soil produces grain –

- 1 first the stalk,
- 2 then the head,
- 3 then the full kernel in the head."⁶

Paul declares,

- 1 "I want to know Christ and
- 2 the power of his resurrection and
- 3 the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings."⁷

To the Thessalonians he wrote about their

- 1 Body
- 2 Soul
- 3 Spirit.^{cx}

John writes to

- 1 children,
- 2 young men,
- 3 and fathers.⁸

(print out 1 John 2:12 – 14)

⁶ Mark 4:23

⁷ Phil. 3:10

⁸ 1 John 2:12–14.

Everything is appropriate in its time, and everything has a proper time and season.⁹ In the community of church, just as in healthy families, each age is cherished and accepted.

(Children)

It is perfectly all right to be selfish, uninvolved in ministering, self-centered, and think “it’s all about me,” **IF** you are a child. The God-given need for a child is to learn that he is loved, accepted, and cherished, period. That is his lot in life. There is nothing else for the child to do. The children in the church are to be loved, accepted, and cherished. This is easier for the infants born into the church family, but it presents an unusual set of problems for the skid row convert.

The difficulty of loving, accepting and cherishing is huge. Odors, language, and customs are different and offensive much in the same way a “ripe diaper” is offensive to a sensitive nose. The best advice to a new Mom or Dad when changing the diaper is, “get over it.” The best advice to the community in greeting the stinky newly born member with a holy kiss is, “get over it.”

Babies grow, and so will the skid row transplant. In fact, his growth and change will astound the community. His odor, language, and customs are just parts of the makeup and costuming Jesus uses when He interfaces with us.

About eight months ago I met Eric. He was at a re-hab for men where I taught a weekly life class. He got my attention big time. He did not seem to have much of a relationship with God, but he told me about a dream he had experienced where God came to him, but told him not to look at Him. Eric was absolutely serious, and the dream had a profound effect on him. I encouraged him to press in to God, read John and let it go at that.

The next week he was beaming. He told me before the meeting that he had started praying again and was reading the Bible for about an hour every night. I rejoiced with him, and as the group was starting I said, “Eric, since you started praying again, would you pray for our meeting?”

He looked flustered, then broke into a smile and said sure. He began strong, but thankfully faltered after a few words. “Hail, Mary, Mother of God uh, uh,”

I quickly broke in, “That’s okay, Eric, I’ll pray.” Week after week the growth was obvious. God was at work in him. His story began to unfold. He had been a carpenter and then a fisherman out of Alaska. He loved drinking beer and had collected a number of D.U.I.’s, He lost his drivers license. Things went bad for him financially and he prayed for God to help him. He went back to Alaska with the thought that God would give him a great season, lots of money, and he could start again. God answered his prayer, but not in the way Eric expected.

He never got ahead financially, and everything seemed to go bad. One night when they were in port, he had his fill of beer, staggered back to the boat, slipped on the ice and fell into the bitter deathly cold water. God orchestrated everything perfectly. The skipper saw this, put on his thermal gear, hollered for Eric to hold on to the piling, and within three or four minutes had him out of the water and on the boat where they stripped him, wrapped him in blankets and

⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

warmed him through the hypothermia. He said something like, "This was sure a sh..y way to answer the f..ing prayer.

After a few more weeks at the re-hab, Eric left and moved in with his Dad at a retirement condo. He planned to go to work at a mission in Mexico or another one where they build houses in Appalachia. God scuttled everything. He was taking care of the legal problems to get his license back, trying to find work, and finally decided to join the Army. Eric is 35 years old and because of Iraq was still young enough to enlist. He passed everything, but they lost his paperwork. For a number of months, Eric has been reading, praying and growing.

He stopped using the "F" and "S" words. Nobody told him to, he just stopped. He had chewed snuff for about 20 years and stopped three weeks ago. No one told him, he just did.

He sent out resumes and got a response from a research ship that needed some fishermen for Alaskan waters. He was a good match, and they wanted to hire him. This is a career opportunity with the government. The past few weeks he has been getting dental work done, physicals, fingerprinting, background checks and jumping through all the hoops that this entails.

Last Saturday at our weekly Prayer? Worship? Teaching? Fellowship? Meeting? (what is this thing we call church?) we all prayed over Eric and sent him out as a missionary to the ship. As part of his training, we had him anoint each of us and bless us. This was a new and mind boggling experience for Eric. He had many questions about what he did and what happened. Someone produced a small bottle of anointing oil and we showed him how to put some on a finger and put it on our heads. We asked him to say whatever he wanted, but at least say, "God bless you in Jesus name."

It was wonderful. One of the sisters, a believer for over sixty years and one who has experienced great moves of God said, "I really felt the anointing and the presence of God when he prayed for me." Now off Eric goes on a ship with a crew of about forty persons. I am excited about what God has planned for that crew and look forward to his reports. He is, as we are all to be, way over his head. His only hope is that he knows how to listen to the voice of the Spirit.

Eric quickly went through most of stage one as a child, and is embarking on the ministry as a growing, thriving young man.

(Young Men)

Young men are strong. They have overcome the evil one. They are hard wired for competition and warfare just as young women are hard wired for motherhood and tenderness. Without any coaching or encouraging, when you give a boy a piece of wood, he has a weapon, while the same thing becomes a little baby for nurturing and tending to most girls.

Again, this genetic, psychological difference is God given. To our shame, we have set the Christian standard of deportment in Sunday Schools to pattern after "sweet Susie," and labeled "Wally the warrior" a sinner. Separate classes and activities for boys and girls at those ages are a must. Let the boys reenact the battle at Jericho, or have nature/creation studies with worms, frogs, snakes, and toads.

Young men like to contend and argue. They are learning elder skills in this process that will serve them well later. A huge problem in “church” today is that the leaders are young men and not fathers. Often they are also “gentile rulers” who have the title “Pastor” and consider themselves untouchable as they “lord it over the flock.”¹⁰ We need fathers, true elders in plurality and mutual submission to lead the churches.

(Fathers)

Fathers have grown through the other stages of life and have become true elders. Elders serve the children and the young men. Elders together meet in the presence of the Lord and receive His directions for the church. Elders have dents and dings in their armor. They are seasoned enough to submit their private agendas and specialties to the fellowship of elders and function together for the church of the city. They are the peacemaker sons of God.¹¹

My favorite exposition of the three levels of growth is from the Song of Songs. We see in this beautiful love story the progression through the three levels and many valuable insights for this thing we call church. Song of Songs is the love story of Solomon and the beautiful Shunamite, of every married couple, of Jesus and His bride the church, and also of Jesus and every individual who makes up His church. This is how He woos and wins us and brings us through the levels of relationship.

The three levels of the love relationship are:

- 1 It’s all about me. (child) “My lover is mine, and I am his.” 2:16
- 2 It’s all about us. (young man/woman) “I am my lovers and my lover is mine.” 6:3
- 3 It’s all about you. (father) “I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me.” 7:10

1 – large open box type letter

We are first attracted to our mate by the way we feel when we are with him. “He makes me feel good. He likes what I like. He gives me special gifts.” We are drawn to Jesus because He loves us, forgives us, gives us eternal life, blesses us, answers our prayers, saves us from hell. Just like a little child, it is all about me, and this is normal and healthy for a time.

The length of time in this and the other stages is as varied as the number of people growing through them. Many people never leave this ego centric stage, but seem to always be looking for what do I get out of it, how will this benefit me, how do I get this or that blessing. When we remain too long a child, we need to hear Paul’s admonition to put childish ways behind us.¹² This first stage is expressed by Solomon, “My lover is mine and I am his.” Song of Songs 2:16

At this level of life or the love relationship, we need to learn the basics. There are foundational truths to learn in the setting of a congregation, or class, or

¹⁰ Matt. 20:25

¹¹ Matt. 5:9

¹² 1 Cor. 13:11

flock. The beloved asks where her lover grazes his flocks and where does he rest them? The friends answer to follow the tracks of the sheep by the tents of the shepherds.¹³ In these settings a child learns do and do, rule on rule, line upon line, a little here a little there.¹⁴ However, this do and do, rule on rule becomes a curse when the beloved refuses to go on and enter into rest. This kind of instruction then becomes a religious trap that causes them to fall.¹⁵

While in this first stage, the Lord is constantly wooing and inviting the beloved to step out, to arise and come with him.¹⁶ The healthy growing child at this level wants to know everything there is to know about her lover. She challenges her teachers, elders, leaders, "Tell me everything your can about my lover." When they are unable or unwilling to tell her more, she must keep on searching.

Now, she must go beyond these teachers and leaders. Her searching and her heart is for Jesus, not for them. She must follow her heart, continue the quest, and scarcely does she pass these watchmen and she finds him.¹⁷

2 big block numeral

The beloved has now grown enough to contribute in the relationship, to be a co-worker, a give-and-take partner in this bond of love. It is no longer all about me, it's about us. Solomon reflects this with a slight change in the wording, "I am my lover's and my lover is mine." 6:3.

In the dynamics of growth, we always have the option of going on, staying stuck at the present level, or slipping backwards. Timely respites can be appropriate and helpful, but to backslide, i.e. dig in your heels or actually turn back, can and ultimately will, lead to death, unless repentance occurs. When it is time to move on then, move on or die.

In much of American Churchianity, the format is for children. You are expected to remain a child and fit into the program. There are few other options. The Pastor tells you all about God, what you should think, how you should act, everything you ought to know. And, if you go beyond him or her, you are rebellious, not obeying your elders, rocking the boat, and not supporting the church. If you do not go beyond him or her, you will fall backward, be injured and snared and captured and effectively neutralized.¹⁸

What a terrible disaster. You will not only miss the milk and honey, the abundant provision from Jesus, but also the milk and honey from under your tongue that is for Him.¹⁹ You will cheat the body of the gift God has made you to be for the others.

This is now the time to get moving. You must apply the line upon line lessons you learned as a child. The class time is over, and now you have to get in the cockpit together with the instructor and learn hands on how to fly this thing.

¹³ Song of Songs 1:7, 8.

¹⁴ Isaiah 28:9, 10.

¹⁵ Isaiah 28:11-13.

¹⁶ Song of Songs 2:10 – 13.

¹⁷ Song of Songs 3:3,4.

¹⁸ Isaiah 28:13.

¹⁹ Song of Songs 4:11.

The instructor explains, encourages, corrects and helps you. But you are now part of the process. You cannot return to the classroom, until the time you return to teach others.

Chapter four of Song of Songs illustrates this time, the second level of “it’s about us” magnificently. Jesus, our lover, lavishes praise on us, his beloved. He tells how we have stolen his heart, and what our glances and attention do to him. He praises us in thrilling and exciting ways. And then right there in the midst of the lavish praise, he gives a most gentle and kind word of correction. He immediately follows it with more praise, but the words of verse 12 are spoken and the ball is now in our court to deal with them or not, “You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.”

The response is courageous. The stormy north wind is invited to come as well as the south wind to blow on the garden. Come and do whatever it takes to unlock the garden and to get the fountain of the water of life to flow. Do whatever it takes to bring me along in your purposes. Do whatever it takes to conform me to the image of Jesus. As the men of Judah²⁰ we are each one the garden of the Lord bearing choice fruits for him.

3-big block

At this point, it is not about me, and it is not even about us anymore. It is all about you; it is all about Jesus. Solomon reflects this sentiment with, “I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me.” 7:10. It is all for my lover, and every obstacle will be overcome.

Somewhere in this process of growing into an elder or a father or one who can truly say, “It’s all about you,” chapter five of Song of Songs shares a part of the journey.

“I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking, ‘Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove...’”²¹ This is the same knocking as Rev. 3:20. Our lover is encouraging us to buy the gold tested and refined in the fire. It is somewhere around two or three in the morning and Jesus knocks on our consciousness.

We know He wants to talk and fellowship, but we respond like the beloved here. “Lord I was late getting to bed and I’ve got a prayer breakfast at 6 A.M., can’t we talk some other time?” Poof – He’s gone. Her whining was that she was in bed and does she now have to dress again and soil her feet. Then she comes to her senses and goes to open the door, but poof – he’s gone. This whining is more indicative of stage two, but stage three is not far off now.

Having now come to her complete senses, she goes out and looks for him, and again encounters the watchmen, the leadership, the elders, the Pastor. This time she did not get to go past them. “The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak those watchmen of the walls.” V14.

Have you ever been beat up by the “church?” The Pastor? The Elders? Don’t feel bad, it is part of becoming a father, of growing to stage three. If you

²⁰ Isaiah 5:7

²¹ Song of Songs 5:2

have never experienced this, do not worry, it will surely happen. Your friends begin to think differently of you also. You become a fanatic or a radical and they say things like, "Why are you so different? You think you are special or something?" That is what the beloved's friends said.²²

This thing we call church then, is a dynamic, growing, expanding, morphing, organism. If we try to limit it in a box, it will burst our container. If we try to fashion a part of it with a strong mission statement or vision, we will also limit the scope and growth of people. It is true that a portion of the church of the city, just like an organ of the body, has a vision or a mission statement that defines their function or purpose. However, it is always in relation to the church of the city or the expression of the body.

For example, a group of believers might form a fellowship of the church of Timbuktu with the vision that they are called of God to gather the dead, dying, and decaying parts and help them exit the body. This is the valid work of the intestines and colon. I doubt that such a statement would ever be written, but this is a crucial job and it must be done. All living bodies and organisms produce waste. The church in those cities where I have lived have needed a good enema or flush. The purpose of this earthy example is a warning about creating vision and mission statements that restrict and keep the dynamic nature of the church from functioning.

With the complexity and constant change of the body, how do we organize and govern this thing we call church? How do we make the parts function together? How do we heal and restore the body? These are questions beyond our human understanding. No one is smart enough to pull off such an assignment. The only one who could possibly govern this thing is the one who upholds all things by the word of his power.²³ This is why we need genuine father/elders: men and women who will walk together in the light and seek His face; tested servants who will follow the directions of the master.

We need genuine Elders.

²² Song of Songs 5:9

²³ Co. 1:17.

Chapter 8, Yeast

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” Matt. 13:33

While attending seminary, I worked several different jobs at a large bakery. One of them was as the night watchman. The process of making bread began shutting down on Friday, and started again very early on Sunday morning. By early evening on Saturday, a watchman was necessary as for a few hours the bakery was empty of all workers. The men who mixed the dough were the first arrivals to begin the process again. My time as the watchman overlapped with them, and I would spend as much time as possible watching them, fascinated with their work. The mixing room was the highest point in the bakery.

They mixed the ingredients in a giant mixer. It looked something like a typical kitchen appliance, only much larger. Instead of cups of flour, they added so many hundred-pound sacks of regular flour, and perhaps two hundred pounds of cracked wheat or whatever. The yeast was broken up by hand and added in large blocks with cold water. When the ingredients were blended together, the mixing bowl was tipped and the dough dumped into a large vat on wheels about ten feet long and three feet wide. Then they wheeled it into the rising room.

This rising room was warm and moist and had room for several of these vats of dough. The bakers had a tool that looked like a combination of a baseball bat and an oar. Whenever the baker wheeled in a new vat, he took the tool and beat the dough in the previous vats. Initially the yeast would rise up in just a few places, but each successive time there were more spots that were leavened. Every time a new vat entered, the previous ones were beaten, hammered, or abused with the special tool until the mixture of dough was without the evidence of the yeast.

When the dough finished its time in the rising room, the vat was wheeled to a chute where a machine tipped the dough down to the next process. The air was again squeezed out and the dough separated into loaf-sized lumps that dropped down to the main floor of the bakery. There they traveled along a conveyor belt for three or four trips across the ceiling while the yeast continued to rise. The lumps were dropped on to another belt, flattened by rollers, rolled up like a log and then dropped into the actual baking pans.

This was another of my jobs at the bakery. I stood at the end of the conveyer that brought the filled pans to me. On my right side was a large rack suspended from the ceiling. Click, click, click, click, click went on for hours. Every fourth click meant a full pan that I had to put on the rack. When the rack was full, I pushed it along and pulled the next one into place. The filled racks went through another rising room and from there into the ovens.

Years later when the Lord was instructing me about the nature of church, He reminded me of all this and used it as a parable for the church.

Like the ingredients for bread dough, the Master Baker's ingredients for the Kingdom of God are the Father's love, the Son's obedience and sacrifice, and the Spirit's power poured out. Forty days after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven. Ten days later, He was crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The anointing oil was poured out on Him and ran down His head, over His Body, even unto His Body on the earth. The Kingdom of Heaven began to spread with power. Three thousand "joined" the church that day as they died with Jesus on the cross in the waters of baptism. Soon it was five thousand more. Daily those who were being saved were added to the church. I have a mental picture of God looking at this with a huge smile on His face. He says something like, "This is wonderful." And then He allows persecution to come like the special tool of the bakers swatting the churning, living, growing church in Jerusalem with persecution.

Then the yeast pops up in Samaria, Antioch, Ethiopia, and throughout the Roman Empire. After the right amount of time, our smiling, loving King does it (or allows it to happen) again, and again, and again. And so, for two thousand years the process has been going on throughout the whole earth. We call some of these phenomena Reformations, Revivals, Renewals, but as my friend Pat Savas ([A Nun Called Gus](#)) says, "We know that there is not going to be a REvival, or a RE anything. (God isn't into Repeats)"

This is the yeast working all through the dough. This is the rock from Nebuchadnezzar's dream of Daniel 2, becoming a mountain and filling the whole world. Now, once in a while, ahead of time, we are privileged to be in one of those "hot spots" where the fermenting yeast makes us drunk with the glory of God. The "hot spots" are increasing in number, geography, and magnitude. When you are in one, it is not "as if" heaven were touching earth, we are literally lifted into the heavenlies and experience a foretaste of true worship and adoration.

I remember Ern Baxter telling us of a "revival" meeting in Vancouver in the '50's. He said the glory of God was present so thick a cloud formed; and the music was spectacular. He was standing by the pianist who took his hands off the keyboard and quit playing. Ern asked him why he stopped playing and he answered, "Those notes aren't on this piano." Similar experiences happened a hundred years ago at Azusa Street, among the Welsh, and at various times sprinkled here and there. It continues to this day, always increasing in numbers of happenings and always drawing closer to the biblical pattern of church of the city. The yeast is working.

I recall the glories of some of our worship times in the hay day of the Shepherding movement. At a meeting in the civic auditorium in Mobile, Alabama, Joe Garlington was leading and we were speechless – all we could do was wave our hands. The power and glory of God that filled Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City in 1977 was palpable. The worship and ministry times at the early Vineyard Gatherings and John Wimber Seminars were a literal taste of heaven. This awesome glory seems to fit comfortably in huge gatherings, but it happens in small, intimate church meetings in homes and work places. It is exploding today throughout the earth.

Asbury College, Toronto, Brownsville, Pasadena, Redding, and in China, Mexico, Australia, Cuba, Uganda, Pakistan, etc. etc., the leaven works, the kingdom comes, and the church grows closer to its full expression city by city. Sometimes the persecution drives it underground and further into the life stream of unsaved humanity. But, at all times and in all situations, the yeast keeps working. Some of the reactions when the yeast meets the dough are bizarre but it is always working, growing, spreading. The zeal of the Lord Almighty is accomplishing this.²⁴ Our Lord is the master of taking negatives, like yeast Biblically, and turning it into a positive parable to illustrate His Kingdom – a lot like our own lives.

The enemy tries to discredit God's work and conjures up counterfeit happenings. He is anxious to keep us divided and impotent, but the yeast keeps on leavening the dough. Satan's time on earth grows shorter. His days are running out and he frantically, unsuccessfully spews the filth out of his mouth to overwhelm us.²⁵ The dragon is enraged, but we overcome him by the blood of the lamb, the word of our testimony, and not shrinking from death.²⁶ The yeast is working. Thank God.

²⁴ Isaiah 9:7

²⁵ Rev. 12:15

²⁶ Rev. 12:11 & 16

Chapter 9 Meetings

Paul made the shocking statement that the “church meetings” of the Corinthians did more harm than good.^{cx1} This was when they met intentionally “as a church.” Church meetings are going on all the time whenever and wherever two or more of us are together in the name of Jesus. But the separation of “church” from everyday life by intentional meetings has done horrible things to the Body of Christ. If you are honest, you will probably say that many “church meetings” which you have attended were boring, dreadful, and harmful. I believe many of them are more destructive than we even imagine.

Paul said the Corinthians were not eating the Lord’s Supper at these intentional “church gatherings.”^{cx2} Yet, they were gathered at a “love feast” to share the bread and wine and the communion with Jesus and with each other. Why was this not the Lord’s Supper?

Because they disregarded the Lord’s body by separating from each other and individually doing their own thing, even in eating and drinking. The rich did not share their provision with the poor. The wealthy got full, but the poor were still hungry. Some drank too much wine and got drunk.

In the context of 1 Corinthians chapters 10,11,12,13, and 14, it is undeniably clear that the primary meaning of not recognizing or discerning the Lord’s body^{cx3} refers to not recognizing each other as part of the church. We called out people are literally the Lord’s body and we are to live as members one of another. There is only one entity of this thing we call church. Many of us also believe that a part of recognizing or discerning the Lord’s body involves an understanding of the impartation of His body through the bread. But, whether you believe in transubstantiation, consubstantiation, or symbolic representation only, we are still all members of the one body.

Now in case you might think this is the only reference to church meetings doing more harm than good, here are some other references. Amos 5:21 says, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. “ By definition these are “church meetings.” You and I might like them, but God says He hates them. He hates the noise of the worship. He detests the liturgy. The prayers bug Him. Why?

Before we answer the why, let’s look at another scripture. Isaiah 1:11-14 says, “the multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?’ says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. “

Both Isaiah and Amos clarify the why. Just like Paul above, both prophets condemn the sinful practices of the people who then gather for religious services as if they were honoring God. Amos demands, “Let justice roll on like a river,

righteousness like a never-failing stream.”^{cxiv} Isaiah commands, “wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right.”^{cxv} Jesus told the hypocritical Pharisees and teachers of the law that Isaiah was right about them, and quoted, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”^{cxvi}

I pray that bells, whistles, and loud sirens begin to go off in our minds as we read this and think about the intentional church meetings we have attended or conducted. I know there have been many times when I thought, “Dear God, I wish he’d please shut up and say amen.” I wonder how many people thought such things when I was preaching or prancing about. Also, where is the line between instruction and encouragement and egotistical control issues? This is a question every elder should ask himself, and ask God to reveal to him.

How much of our intentional meetings are rules taught by men, and what is spirit and truth? Jesus told the great evangelist woman at the well, “God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.”^{cxvii} Liturgies and rituals are sometimes helpful, but often harmful. It is just like brushing your hair, if you have any, or washing your face. We do it quicker and more efficiently by following a ritual and so we can do it while half asleep without paying attention. That’s helpful for our daily rituals, but when we turn “church” into these kinds of rote activities, we endanger our relationship with God. Wow, do you think that’s too harsh? I do not.

Jesus taught us what to pray. He gave us an outline of prayer in the Sermon on the Mount^{cxviii} and again in a little different form at another time when his disciples asked Him to teach them to pray as John taught his disciples.^{cxix} I believe these are patterns or general subjects we should be praying about. Yet in our intentional church meetings, we have often turned this suggested prayer for disciples into an incantation without thought or meaning, or without spirit and truth. Is this too harsh, or does empty pagan repetition actually please our Father?

In most of our “unintentional church meetings” this danger does not exist. If Betty and I are taking a walk and enjoying God’s creation and each other, we very likely may break into prayer or praise for His handiwork. In this church meeting, meaningless or thoughtless repetition is not much danger. When we as sons and daughters of God meet another believer, suddenly by the definition of two or three in His name, an unintentional church meeting is in session. Christ Jesus desires to be the focal point of all our life. When He is honored, acknowledged, and invited into all facets of life, it is church at its finest.

I believe that the most important and significant church meetings are families gathered around the table for a meal. The best interaction, encouragement, nurturing, teaching, and direction naturally happens when this basic, God-ordained unit of church is meeting. Jesus is present and ecstatically happy to be invited and honored in the meal-time church meeting. Everyone is a part, and everyone participates.

Okay then, who wants intentional gatherings? Doesn't the Bible say to not give up meeting or assembling together?^{cxx} Didn't God call for assemblies under the old covenant? Doesn't God want us to have intentional church meetings?

The old covenant summary and references to God calling His people to an assembly or convocation is in Leviticus chapter twenty-three. The first assembly called for by God was the Sabbath.^{cxxi} This is a weekly gathering no matter where the people might be. They were to observe the Sabbath. The hundreds of references to Sabbath observance are all centered in rest. Enter the rest of God. Cease from labor. This passage in Leviticus is a rare reference to assembling together on the Sabbath. So the question must be asked, "Where were they to gather?" Answer: the Sabbath gathering place is the dinner table.

Well what about the Synagogue? The synagogue as a meeting place was a practice the Jews brought back from Babylon. There were no synagogues before the exile. There were "high places" where gatherings were held, but these were not approved by God, although He used them at times.^{cxxii} For those of us who are followers of Jesus, we were warned that we would be beaten in the synagogues.^{cxxiii} These "meeting places" would be a grave danger for us.

The other three assemblies or convocations commanded in Leviticus twenty-three were Passover and First Fruits, then fifty days later The Feast of Weeks. The third gathering was in the fall of the year and included The Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement nine days later, and then the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days just five days after Yom Kippur.

These holy convocations were for the most part parties. This assembling of the people of God was a joyous occasion and God even commanded them to celebrate.^{cxxiv} When they went to Jerusalem for the worship party they were allowed to take some of the tithes they set aside for this and use it to buy wine or strong drink to celebrate together with God.^{cxxv} They were commanded, "Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice."^{cxxvi}

This is a real church meeting. It is most like a family reunion or a group camping trip. It could be a group of believers attending a convention or seminar or workshop. It could be anything where we live together in the presence of the Lord. Remember, Jesus came to give us life.^{cxxvii} In our old nature, we turn that into a religion, and separate "church" from life. Jesus is demoted to a couple hours in a building, after which we go and live life without Him.

To say that "church" is an "intentional meeting" where we are to present ourselves in a building patterned after a synagogue or pagan temple is wrong. To think that this attendance is necessary when ill-informed clergy persons say inane things like, "It's good to be in the house of the Lord," is ludicrous. To be a spectator in a religious show with professional musicians, trained orators, costumes, lighting, stages, and no interaction is optional at best, and destructive to the command to make disciples at worst.

Beloved, this thing we call church is a mess. However, the thing God calls church is beautiful. It is an exquisitely gorgeous bride preparing for her wedding. It is the literal body of Christ Jesus coming into health and well being. It is the

symphony of the city about to bring forth music the world has never heard. It is the sons and daughters of God setting all creation free from its bondage to decay as our Creator had hoped.^{cxxviii}

In reviewing this chapter it sounds like I am against intentional gatherings as church in local settings beyond family. I am not. I think intentional meetings are fine and commendable, but dangerous. Larger, special gatherings are inspiring and motivational. Different flocks and groups meeting together at times for special programs are very helpful. Regular weekly or bi-weekly or even daily assemblies are okay. The thing that is not okay is turning this thing we call church into a religious exercise that is separated from life.

Chapter 10 The Place of Reconciliation

Our salvation was completed through the work of Jesus on the cross. When He said, "It is finished," it was finished.^{cxxix} His resurrection from the dead proved that His work was accepted by our Father as just payment for all sin.^{cxxx} Now, however, after we receive this great salvation, we have to work it out in our own lives.^{cxxxi}

This is exactly the case with reconciliation. All reconciliation was accomplished by the work of Jesus on the cross. He has broken down every dividing wall that separates His people.^{cxxxii} Now, however, we have to work it out in this thing we call church. Here are some perceived needs for reconciliation some of which are myths.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION: This is a misunderstanding of words. There is only one race - the human race. We are one people by creation and through the cross. We are all of the family of God. We are all descended from Noah or Adam. This is all there is – one human family. To say that we have to reconcile the races is like saying we have to reconcile Quarter Horses with the Arabians, race horses with plow horses, roans with Pintos. This is preposterous. Lots of our problems are semantic. What is usually meant by those who see race as divided is ethnic reconciliation.

When others ask about the racial make-up of your fellowship, you might properly answer, "There is only one race in our group, the human race." This is also a good response on questionnaires that ask for race – human, is the correct answer.

ETHNIC RECONCILIATION is the coming together of the various ethnic groupings: African American, Native American, European American, Hispanic, Asian, etc. Our world system fosters the segregated hatred between peoples. Never in my lifetime have I experienced this as intensely as when I served time in jail as an advocate for life. We were told, "Blacks with Blacks, Whites with Whites, and Mexicans with Mexicans." The fights, the tensions, and the divisions were intensified by this separation. The "system" was not interested in rehabilitation, but only in their job security and safety. Satan's strategy is to divide and conquer, and he uses the systems of the world very effectively.

I was part of a ministry house in Omaha for several years in the heart of the gangs and violence. I winced at the constant emphasis by many of the wealthier white congregations out west who meant well, but irritated me no end by their emphasis on getting reconciled. I realize that Satan has caused divisions, but we are already reconciled at the foot of the cross. When Jesus purchased us from all nations, and changed who and what we are, He made us one body, one people, one church. I don't need to get reconciled with my family of other ethnic origins; I need to live like who I am – a brother to every believer, a new creature in Christ Jesus together with all of God's family. The family, which

will gather before the throne of God, is a multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language.^{cxxxiii}

One of the best ways to walk out this reconciliation in this thing we call church is to do what Paul commanded four times: “Greet one another with a holy kiss.”^{cxxxiv} Peter brings the total to five when he commands to greet with a “kiss of love.”^{cxxxv} Don’t give me the pious piffle I received at the Seminary, “This means for us today, a warm and friendly hand shake.” Balderdash! It means to lay a wet one on the cheek or lips of your brother or sister.

I remember my first experience at greeting one another with a holy kiss forty some years ago. I was still a Lutheran Pastor and was hosting a small conference of twenty to thirty fellow Missouri Synod Pastors. In my devotional reading that morning I read the command, checked it in the concordance, read each of the passages, and decided to greet the Pastors with a Holy Kiss.

It was a nice day and I waited in front of the building for the brothers to arrive. The first man out of his car was a retired Army Chaplain whom we called, “Herr Gruber” He walked very erect like a ramrod, was ultra conservative, even for us, and was well into his seventies at that time. I thought, “Oh no. Not him.” But, I had committed myself to this greeting, and I kissed his cheek.

He did not relax his embrace, but held me in a mini bear hug. When we did part, he had tears streaming down his face.

One of the next men to arrive was a younger preacher, who shoved me in the chest, with the words, “What are you, some kind of queer?”

I thought, “Look at this - two unexpected and radical opposing reactions to the kiss. I’m going to keep it up.” The wonderful response of the retired chaplain made the embarrassment of the younger man seem very trivial. When people began to realize what I was doing, some made sure they got a greeting, but a few others began to sneak out the side door or avoid direct contact with me.

During my years as chaplain at the re-hab, when some of the residents knew a new man was there, they would hang around to watch his reaction when I greeted him with a holy kiss. The men who came directly from prison had the hardest time with it, but almost all of them accepted it, and then loved it.

Naturally there are exceptions to this practice, just like there are exceptions to hugging, or hand shaking, or even greeting someone. But, these are exceptions, not the rule. The rule in the New Testament and in this thing we call church is to kiss. Try it, you might like it. It is a powerful tool in walking out the ethnic reconciliation that was completed on the cross.

SEXUAL OR GENDER RECONCILIATION was also accomplished on the cross. Lots of problems still exist, but it is legally and spiritually finished. Reconciliation in Christ has been accomplished for Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female.^{cxxxvi} It has been completed at the cross. The problems that still exist are from our not living like who we really are – the literal, physical body of Christ.

Jesus Himself is our peace and has made each of the above couplets a unity by destroying the dividing wall of hostility between them. “His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this

one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross..^{cxxxvii} I realize this section deals primarily with Jew and Greek, but the principle fits the rest.

DOCTRINAL RECONCILIATION is more challenging. It requires open minds and a level of personal security in God to honestly consider other positions or points of tension. Please refer to chapter three, "Tension, Understanding Doctrine," and chapter four, "Unity."

DENOMINATIONAL RECONCILIATION IS A MYTH. Denominations (33,000+) are irreconcilable. They are creations of man based on various points of doctrine or practice. Many of the members of these religious groups are part of Christ's Body and are one with us. But the organizations themselves are merely scaffolding on the walls of the church of the city. The scaffolding must come down when the building is finished.

Many if not most of the denominational systems are actually dividing walls between the fragmented parts of Jesus' Church. As such, they were officially destroyed or broken down by the cross. The sooner the realization is made that they are spiritually illegal, the better. I pray that many of our denominational brothers might willingly disband their divisive organizations falsely called "churches," and join ranks in the one church of the city. Our brothers and sisters are leaving these organizations by the droves. Many are hearing the call to "come out of her" and apply that message to leaving these religious systems.^{cxxxviii}

So, in this thing we call church, live like who you are. In Christ you are new, totally reconciled, baptized, washed, sanctified, justified, unified, set apart, holy, precious, useful, beloved, appointed, anointed, and competent. Therefore live a loving, joy-filled, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled life to the glory of our King.

Chapter 11 The Temple of the Lord

There are three temples of the Lord in the Bible. The first two were built during the fourth millennium of human history. Since a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day,^{cxxxix} and Peter emphasizes that we are not to forget this one thing, that a day is as a thousand years,^{cxli} the first two temples represent the sun and the moon of the fourth day of creation. Solomon's Temple was the moon that reflected the light of the Son/sun. The uncountable number of sacrifices there and the immeasurable flow of blood were pictures of the coming Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.^{cxli}

The heart of those first two Temples was the Ark of the Covenant, located in the Holy of Holies. It was separated from the people by a thick veil and covered by the "Mercy Seat." Once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, the High Priest took two goats representing the coming Messiah. On the "scapegoat" he laid his hands and symbolically placed the sins of the people on the goat which was then taken into the wilderness, never to return. God's scapegoat removed our sins as far as the east is from the west. The other goat was sacrificed and the blood sprinkled on top of the ark, on the "mercy seat."

Within the Ark were the two tablets of stone that Moses brought down from Sinai; a pot of manna, representing God's care for His people; and Aaron's rod which budded as a symbol of the priesthood. God's presence dwelt over the mercy seat, between the wings of the Cherubim. The Lord was shielded from the sins of the people, as reflected in the tablets of the law, by the sprinkled blood of the Yom Kippur sacrifice.

That first Temple was destroyed in 586 BC because of the wickedness and unbelief of our Jewish ancestors. After the return from Babylon a second temple was built. It seemed small and insignificant compared to the previous one,^{cxlii} but the Prophet said, "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty. And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty."^{cxliii} The sun emits its own light; the moon merely reflects it. The Son of God Himself came into this second temple bringing peace to all who would receive Him.

That second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. The third Temple of God is constructed of living stones, and is a habitation or dwelling place for God. We are the third temple of God.^{cxliv} This thing we call church has become the House of God, the building of God, the Temple of God. We His people are the final Temple of God in this age. There will be no other Temple of God. If any other temples are built, they will be something else, but not the temple of God.

Solomon, the son of David built the first temple with beautiful stones dressed and prepared at the quarry.^{cxlv} He spent seven years building it.^{cxlvi} The Son of David, whom David called Lord,^{cxlvii} is building the present Temple with living stones, fashioned and prepared at the cross of His own suffering and now perfect in the sight of our Father. He labored three and a half years to bring

perfection and an end to sacrifice.^{cxlviii} We church members, or living stones,^{cxlix} or arks of His presence, are being built together into this Temple of God for the remaining forty-two months, 1,260 days, or time, times and half a time.^{cl}

Solomon prayed at the dedication of the Temple and when he finished, the fire of God fell and consumed the sacrifices.^{cli} David's greater Son prayed for the dedication of the third Temple/church,^{clii} and the anointing oil of the Spirit of God was poured on the Head of the Body in heaven, and ran down on the rest of this body called church. Tongues of the fire of God fell on the living stones on Pentecost.

When the religious, lying connivers were trying to find fault with the faultless one, the charge was, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and rebuild it in three days.'"^{cliii} What Jesus had said when He drove out the money changers was, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."^{cliv} He spoke of the temple of His Body. The foundations for this Temple were laid in the eternal victory over sin and death that took place during those three and a half days in the belly of the earth. It took another forty years before the now obsolete second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

We, this thing called church, are the eternal Temple of the living God. We living stones are the Ark of the Covenant. The law is written in our hearts. God provides for us our daily bread. We are a kingdom of priests before God.

1 John 2:2 says: "He (Jesus) is the propitiation (KJV) or expiation (RSV) or atoning sacrifice (NIV) for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." The word translated propitiation, expiation or atoning sacrifice is a picture of the blood covering over the mercy seat. The blood of Jesus is upon us and cleanses us from all defilement. It even now flows through our veins as we are in truth, the body of Christ.

In the old system, the presence of God remained over the ark. The blood "covered" the Ark, so God was able to dwell there. He met with the people there, between the wings of the cherubim. Now, He dwells in us and among us in this thing we call church.

The old covenant has been fulfilled. It is now obsolete.^{clv} It has been superseded by the new.

The veil has been torn from top to bottom – forever torn. And no matter how hard religion tries to sew it back up, it has been obliterated. All are free to enter the Holy of Holies. God our Father is free and willing to relate to all of us through the blood of His Son.

I am the ark of the new covenant. You are the ark of the new covenant. We are the vessels of the presence of God.

Before leaving this subject, I want to relate the story of Uzzah to us as the new arks. King David greatly honored Uzzah. David chose Uzzah to accompany the ark on its journey to Jerusalem. The oxen stumbled. Uzzah took hold of the ark. God killed him on the spot. David was mad at God and afraid. The ark stayed near by at the house of Obed-Edom. Uzzah meant well. Uzzah was protecting God. Uzzah manhandled the Ark. Uzzah did what he thought was best. Uzzah, like David, disregarded the commands of God about the ark.

We are the arks of the presence of God. We must respect and honor the arks of the new covenant. We must love the arks. We must not treat them according to our own personal prejudices or doctrinal predispositions. These God-directives about the arks apply far, as far as possible, even unto ourselves. Live like who you are o great ark of His presence. Church gatherings are places where the ark is manifest in His called out people.

Under the old covenant, wherever the ark went, that place was holy from then on.^{clvi} Under the new covenant wherever we the church go and dwell is also holy for the ark of the Lord is there. The whole earth is filled and is being filled with His glory and holiness as the arks go everywhere. We are the sons of the living God that all creation has been longing for. We are to bring the freedom from the bondage to decay.^{clvii} Again, live like who you are o great ark of His presence.

Chapter 12 Enemies of the Church

Enemies Without The World

We live in a world that is not our home. Jesus has called us out.^{clviii} He said that the world would hate us, and that we would have trouble, but to take heart because He had overcome the world.^{clix} He conquered the world and made a public spectacle of every demonic force by triumphing over them on the cross.^{clx} We belong to a different Kingdom, a different society, a different way of life. This world that we have been called from is not the creation. That still belongs to the Lord^{clxi} and has been entrusted to our care.

The world that is our enemy is what John describes as, “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does.”^{clxii} This is the world of which satan is prince. He is not prince of this creation. One of my other favorite definitions of the world was given by W.J.E. “Ern” Baxter, the beloved gravelly voiced preacher who said, “The world is man organizing himself apart from God.” This mess called world is our mortal enemy.

It tries to squeeze us into its mold,^{clxiii} choke out the growth of the seed of the word growing in us,^{clxiv} and has formed an evil alliance with satan and our old dead nature. The world is the enemy of the church.

My Old Nature

My natural self, or old nature, or sarx, was put to death on the cross with Jesus in the waters of baptism.^{clxv} It is dead. It is no longer a real part of me, in spite of the fact that it still has an effect on me. I do not want to do the things that the old nature wants, and therefore when I do them, it shows that it really isn't me that is doing them any more.^{clxvi} My real identity is the Frank Smith expression of Christ, a form of the living God. I despise the works of my flesh.

My body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to God. Yet, that old dead thing sneaks to life in this very temple and with the aid of its counselors, satan's minions and the world's ways, it decrees that I am to serve its lustings as if it was God. There may be one pinnacle of evil, a final anti-Christ that shows up on the scene in these last days, but this old nature of mine is certainly an anti-Christ. It is also probably the most deceptive and treacherous one I will ever have to face. He knows where all my buttons are. He wants me out of this thing we call church. He wants me out of this relationship with Christ. The old nature is a formidable enemy of the church.

Satan's kingdom

Unclean spirits, principalities, powers, rulers of this present darkness are also all enemies of the church. The litany of evils in our day is long and familiar. Each of us can list more of them than we are comfortable listing. Each sin, each vice, each temptation is natural to my old nature, natural to the world, and is

inspired by, motivated by, and empowered by spiritual forces. We must fight them.

There can be no pacifists in this thing we call church. The devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for those he can devour.^{clxvii} He is good at causing the false belief that he doesn't exist. If you buy that lie, he can play with you like a cat with a mouse. He is also good at pushing you over the other edge – that everything is his fault and you have no culpability in these things. Satan is evil, vicious, wicked, destructive, but he is not stupid. Fight the good fight.

All of satan's servants were defeated on the cross by Jesus. We must now stand against them in that same victory. Our personal call to arms in Ephesians^{clxviii} says our struggle is a spiritual battle against the devil's schemes. It is not against flesh and blood, but the spiritual forces of wickedness that operate behind the scenes. We are told to stand four times in those verses. We do not attack this foe, for then we would have to do battle in our strength. We stand in the accomplished victory that our Champion wrested on the cross. We stand. Whatever the raging tumult, we stand in His victory. We stand with our armor in place.

We classified these three enemies, the devil, the world and our flesh, as foes without the church. I'm sure most of you have been thinking, "Don't kid yourself, those demonic things are sitting in the pew also. And, the world is in the church, as well as our old natures." That is all very true in regards to the visible church, the various physical expressions of the fellowships.

In the Lutheran catechism instruction we made a distinction between the visible and invisible church. The visible church was everybody that says, "I am a Christian," including hypocrites and the unsaved. The invisible church consists of everyone who truly is a believer. Only God knows the exact make up of this group. These are the ones who truly worship the Father, through the Son, in the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.

I reviewed the Lutheran Catechism while writing this section and shuddered at the references to dealing with sin. Bill Johnson's words about creating sin management systems rang loud and clear in my spirit. Church gatherings are holy meetings, but there is a huge a problem.

I have a tendency (a default mechanism) to see myself as a "sinner." I have grown up in a society that is shame based and guilt ridden. Even after I have passed from death to life in Christ Jesus, I still focus on my errors, or sins. The times I have missed the mark dominate my thinking rather than the cleansing of the blood of Christ as I walk in the light together with my family.^{clxix} "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord."^{clxx}

Some teachers look at three different scriptures to say that Christians are called "sinners." The first is this section in Romans 7, but as we have seen, this is not me. I am the new creation and the old is passed away. The second scripture is from James where he says, "Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." I think James is referring to the double mindedness,

and this cannot be used as a proof text that Christians are still sinners. The third reference is the Timothy passage where Paul says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst." This is present tense, "I am the worst," but if you read the sentences before and after, Paul is clearly talking about what he was before Christ rescued him.

Thank God that I have been rescued. I have been saved. Thank God that I have a new identity and a new nature. Thank God that the old "sinner," although still trying to live in me, is no longer me. When I do those things I do not want to do, it shows that it is no longer I, but sin living in me that does them.^{clxxi} I am a new creation. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."^{clxxii}

I am seated in Christ in the heavenly realms.^{clxxiii} I am also far above all rule and authority, power and dominion in Christ.^{clxxiv} Since I have been raised to a new life in Christ, I am to set my mind on the things where my true life exists – in the heavens.^{clxxv} Here on the earth, I press on to take hold of the reality of what Christ has already accomplished in me.^{clxxvi} "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."^{clxxvii} I am a son of God, led by the Spirit of God.^{clxxviii}

God is a spirit, and we who worship Him, must worship in spirit and truth. God is actually looking for people who will do this.^{clxxix} In the Spirit, I am the new creation. In the truth (Christ), I am holy and without sin. The Peace like a river has washed me, and I can sing with exultation:

*"My sin, O the thought of this glorious truth,
my sin, not in part but the whole,
is laid on the cross and I bear it no more,
it is well, it is well with my soul."*

From God's point of view, I am sinless. He has happily exchanged the righteousness of Christ for my wickedness. He is pleased to acknowledge and accept His Only-begotten Son's rejection in my place, and to transfer the holiness of Jesus to Frank Smith by faith. It honors God when I relate to our Father as His righteous son. It dishonors God and demeans the work of Christ when I relate to Him as a sinner.

Now, whose viewpoint is right? Is it more righteous or religious to continue to see myself as this struggling sinner? Is the human viewpoint correct? Or, is God's perspective of me more accurate? Is God's viewpoint more real than my own personal assessment?

Is it more valuable to focus on sins and shortcomings and say, "Stop it?" Or is it more effective to say, "Live like who you are, you new creation in Christ?" Walk after the Spirit and not after (against?) the flesh.

Beloved, see as God sees! Think like God thinks! Stay in your place in the heavenly realms and keep your thinking in accordance with the truth and reality of God!

From God's perspective, there are no sinners in this thing we call church!
The church is the fellowship of the saints. The church is the gathering of the redeemed. The church is the assembly of the righteous where sinners are

excluded. “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly (church) of the righteous.”^{clxxx}

Sinners come into the fellowship of the saints and are loved and served and blessed, but they are not part of the church until they are born from above. When they repent, change their thinking, and receive the obliteration of all sin, then they can attend the assembly of the righteous, which takes place in the Holy Spirit.

This introduces another horrible enemy of the church. RELIGION: “a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, esp. when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs”^{clxxxii} The New Testament has a very different spin on religion. “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”^{clxxxii} Or, we “should learn first of all to put their (our) religion into practice by caring for their (our) own family.”^{clxxxiii}

Religion separates our faith from life and makes it into a system. Jesus came that we might have life,^{clxxxiv} and we turn it into a religion that requires certain meetings and obligations. This approach is championed by another set of bad guys: the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a sect of the Jewish community who differed from the Sadducees in strict observance of the law and belief in an afterlife. Paul was from this group. The word in the lower case means, “a sanctimonious, self-righteous, or hypocritical person.”^{clxxxv}

The biggest problem I personally face in this is the Pharisee who is such an integral part of my rotten old nature. That thing will rise up at the drop of a religious cliché, and I must exercise the power of my new life in Christ to reckon it or count my old self as dead.^{clxxxvi} I spent five years in Seminary, and one year of internship, and about twenty years as a denominational franchise director. I have been trying to sort this all out for years. This thing we call church is very susceptible to this pharisaic spirit.

Self-appointed sheriffs of the Kingdom continue their ancient religious challenges, “By what authority?” “We never did it that way before.” Who do you think you are?” Or at other times, they will ooze their yuckiness with, “There but by the grace of God go I.” Grace is love I don’t deserve and I thank God for all of His grace. Therefore, this translates into the same prayer Jesus said one of them prayed, “Thank you God that I am not like this tax collector.”^{clxxxvii} Or you may hear, “It’s good to be in the house of the Lord.” Be careful about empty-headed religious sounding prayers and clichés. We are the house of the Lord.

When you see a homeless addict, do not pray the Pharisee prayer, “There but by the grace...” Realize, that is a precious one for whom Jesus sacrificed everything. He is my brother human being, and can possibly become my spiritual brother. Ask the Holy Spirit what you are to do for him, and then do it. If the drunk lying in the gutter were your physical alcoholic brother, I think you would do a lot more than thank God that you are not like that.

This thing we call church has many enemies, but they have all been defeated by our Hero. Live in that exciting truth and reality, and stand.

Chapter 13 The Cosmic Kingdom

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”^{clxxxviii}

The last verse above provides a very different and compelling definition of church: “The church is the fullness of the body of Christ that fills everything in every way.” The other point of tension to the doctrine of the church is, “Wherever two or three come together in the name of Jesus.”^{clxxxix} This thing we call church exists in every conceivable expression of people along the spectrum between these two points. I am just beginning to scratch the surface of our (the church’s) responsibility in setting creation free from its bondage to decay, and our place in this facet of the redemptive work of the body.

Christ fills everything in every way. We are His body. “The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”^{cxc} We look at the heavens and ask: “Why does everything stay apart, and not come crashing together? What keeps the earth from the sun? What is this force of gravity that keeps us from floating away? Why does gravity not draw the moon back to earth? What makes this beautiful little blue ball we call earth, habitable? The answer to all these questions is Jesus. He sustains or upholds all things by the word of His power for, or on behalf of, His church.

Now turn and look inward to the smallest of things we can now, sort of, observe – quantum physics and sub-atomic particles. How does this all hold together? My mind was recently stunned while watching “What the Bleep, Down the Rabbit Hole.” The spaces between the subatomic particles or energy blips or whatever they are, are a lot like the spaces between the earth and the moon, or the sun in its orbit. If you could turn off the “dynamic” that makes it all work and reduce the space to only what is the “solid stuff,” the “solid stuff” in a large house would probably not be visible in a teaspoon. (That is, even if it is stuff at all and not just raw energy.) The greatest space by far in all matter is empty space. What holds this all together? What keeps the empty spaces in their integrity so not every piece of matter just mixes itself with the other pieces of matter? What is the eternal dynamic that makes this all work? Jesus!

There are laws or rules or principles of chemistry, physics, mathematics, that work on certain levels of this creation, but have no effect on the other levels.

How can this be? How does a hydrogen atom stay a hydrogen atom in air, water, and other compounds, even if changed by fire? And yet, if a very small number of those atoms are split, the energy unleashed in the process endangers the earth itself. What keeps a chain reaction from splitting all the atoms? What is this energy? What makes it all work? The answer to these questions, and in fact the answer to every question is, Jesus. Jesus is the answer! What is the question?

Messiah Jesus is governor over the Milky Way, the Andromeda Strain, the Pleiades, the Black Holes, all comets, asteroids, and cosmic activities of every kind. He is the head over all these things for us, His church. This means that every cosmic phenomenon happens in ways that benefit this thing we call church. When Haley's Comet approached earth a few years ago, insane demonic activity took the lives of a number of folks in Rancho Santa Fe, California. Christ died for those people, but they evidently never accepted their blood purchased rights as children of God. Haley's Comet came for the benefit of the great congregation (church) of the Lord. How well did we capitalize on this phenomenon?

Everything that is allowed to happen in heaven and on earth is in the interest of the church of Jesus Christ. All events are orchestrated by the All-powerful One who manipulates world and celestial events for us. There is a battle and an enemy, but our opponent has already been defeated. Wars and revolutions are allowed but kept within certain boundaries determined by how the church will respond and take advantage of the situations.

Our King is relentless. He wants His Bride to be a glorious church without spot or wrinkle. He wants to be loved, but refuses to violate any would be lover's free will. He will not force church membership on anyone. He coaxes, woos, draws, and loves everyone to Himself. Right now today this process is going on. We are workers together with God in all of this.^{cxci} Everything that is allowed to happen has been determined to help expedite the church-growth process. Nothing can happen that cannot be worked for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose.^{cxcii} Otherwise, it could not possibly be.

By now some might be questioning, "Wait, wait, what does this have to do with a Sunday morning gathering in a 'church' building?" The better question would be, "What does a Sunday morning gathering in a 'church' building have to do with this thing we call church?" Gravity, speeds of light, the solar system, all of space is governed for, in the interest of, us, the church of the living God. So when the moon turns to blood,^{cxciiii} or the sky rolls up like a scroll,^{cxciiv} it is all in our best interest.

We need to open our eyes to see all creation and world events from this heavenly perspective. King Jesus rules over His universal, cosmic Kingdom for the church. He micro manages and macro manages everything in all creation.

In this seven thousand year biblical age of man, I believe God has had two overriding purposes:

FIRST – to get a bride for His Son – this thing we call church.

SECOND – to rid eternity of evil.

TIME (A huge flushing device)

One of the elders in southern Idaho, Dick Staats said, "Time is a temporary interruption in eternity for the purpose of dealing with the sin issue." The interruption is for seven thousand years. It is God's plan and design to rid eternity of evil and rebellion. The lake of fire is prepared for the devil and his angels; and now those here in time that choose to follow them will also join them in that place. The entrance into that lake is through time, which is somehow sealed from eternity. When Satan is cast out of heaven, he comes to earth in time and gets sealed in this giant flushing device.

Time is also used by God to create beings "like" Himself. And it is also the workplace to sort them out. All of this began in eternity in the mind of God and the heart of Christ. Proverbs eight shows this intimate creative interplay between the Father and the Son. "I was there when He set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep.... Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind."^{CXCV}

The delight of God for mankind, His love for us, uses this time to gain a Bride for the Son of God and a family for our Father. And all this is done by the cross. It starts with the cross. It continues through the cross. It is finished on the cross. God Himself entered this giant flushing device of time to rescue a people for Himself.

Jesus paid the price for our redemption, and alone battled Satan and every evil principality and power. He triumphed over them by the cross. He drew them into a battle that was both for our salvation and also the way out of eternity and away from God for evil. We choose life – Jesus. Others, whose reward is in this life, choose good and evil, just as Adam and Eve did. That choice will seal them in this large flushing device of time.

As Eve was taken from the side of Adam, we who are being renewed in His image, are taken from the side of the second Adam. We are born of the water and the blood that flowed from His side. We are born new, from above, by His life-giving Spirit. We died with Christ to the old, and are raised from the dead in Him to live this new life as strangers and pilgrims in this world. We are strangers and pilgrims just going through the time flushing device, until we are forever with the Lord. Satan, at the end of all this, will be forever away from the Lord, forever out of eternity. The cross is used by God in our new creation, and it is the broom He uses to sweep evil out of eternity.

"Time is the vestibule of eternity," writes Paul Billheimer in his excellent book, Don't Waste Your Sorrows. Time is the entryway into eternity for us, but it is also the back door for Satan and his followers out of eternity.

Time and eternity is best illustrated, I believe, by the image of a burning rod within a large room. The rod begins at a certain place and ends at another specific spot. It is something like a huge burning cigar-like rod. The ash is the past, the red coal is the present, and the unburned section is the future. All action in time is limited to the burning heat of the present. All of us who live in time are limited to what's happening now. Eternity, however, does not appear to have that restriction. In the room that designates eternity, you can go up or down, forward or backwards, or stay at the same spot. Time is limited to the burning coal of the present, while eternity has no such dimensional limitation.

There are seven sections to this giant flushing device called time. When God began this temporary interruption in eternity, He took seven days to create it. In 2 Peter 3:8 we read, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." Well then, the thousand year millenniums should be like the seven days of creation. How does this work out?

Day one is light and darkness separated into day and night. Millennium one is life and death - life here in the burning present and the separation of death. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."^{CXCVI} Those who lived in that first millennium lived almost a thousand years.

Day two is the separation of the waters – waters above, waters below. Millennium two is centered around the flood – the waters that covered the whole earth.

Day three is the gathering of the waters and the appearance of the land together with vegetation etc. Millennium three begins with the call of Abraham, the promise of the land, wandering in the land, the 400 years of slavery, and the conquest of the land.

Day four is the creation of sun and moon. Millennium four begins with Solomon's Temple, which was like the moon, reflecting the Son of God. All the sacrifices and rituals of this temple pointed to the coming Messiah. Because of sin this temple was destroyed and the people went into captivity. They returned after the seventy years and began building the second temple, which would actually be visited and cleansed by the Son of God. The glory of this house was greater than former because of Jesus.

(The third Temple of God is us – living stones fashioned together as a dwelling for God. Day five, six, and seven are the "last days." Jesus' entrance into the flushing device of time was at the end of day four and the beginning of day five.)

Day five is the creation of the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. These are symbols of the gentiles. Millennium five is the story of the gospel to the Jews

first and then to the Gentiles. The good news of the Messiah's entrance into time and His victory over sin and death spread out from the matrix of earthly Israel and into the whole world – to whosoever will, who now becomes part of spiritual and eternal Israel.

Day six is the creation of man. Millennium six is man, man, man. Man as discoverer, explorer, inventor, healer, conqueror, educator, all wise, all knowing, and without the need of God.

On day seven, God rested. God observed the Sabbath, which He made for us. In millennium seven we will rest in Him. We will observe this millennial Sabbath where Jesus reigns and rules. How this millennium will play out, I am not sure, but I do know that it will be as different as the world before the flood, and after the flood. It will be as different as Israel under David and Solomon compared to the Nazi Holocaust. We who are worthy of the first resurrection can and will rule with Him with a rod of iron.

In this Anno Domini 2008, where exactly are we on or in this time line or flushing device? We are in the window of transition between day six and day seven. This is a scripturally saturated time, lots and lots written and said about these days, but with a huge lack of understanding and agreement. It is like Jesus' first coming. There were Simeon's and Anna's who had revelation from God, but most people were clueless.

How should we live during this pregnant time? With courage and faith, zealotry for His house and His honor, with persistence and grace. Understanding the times, that those invited have refused, the halt, lame and blind are already in, and now it is time to compel others to come in. If you hold to the pre-millennial rapture doctrine, let that be your hope, but build your life on the basis that you will follow Jesus even to the cross. That you will deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Him wherever He leads, and through whatever trials He brings you.

The War

The battle, no the war, between Satan and God began with Satan's foolish rebellion and the drawing away of one third of the angels. I don't know if that happened before Genesis 1:3 or after it; if it was before Genesis 1:1, or between 1:1 and 1:3. How that war showed itself in heaven, I don't really know either. But, battles were fought in the heavenlies over Job, in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve for their lives, on Mount Nebo or somewhere in Moab with Michael over the body of Moses, in Persia (?) for twenty-one days over the answer to Daniel's prayer. But the greatest and ultimate battle took place on the cross where our Champion overcame the world and also disarmed "the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."^{cxvii}

When Jesus cried, "It is finished," the war was won. His resurrection proves that. But, Satan is still accusing the brothers, he still corrupts those who walk in darkness, he still steals, kills, and destroys all who open the door of their life to him through sin, fear, and unbelief. Soon, very soon, the devil and his angels will be cast down to the earth, no longer able to bring their accusations before God, but will be limited to this time, this giant flushing device. After some desperation attempts to nullify what happened on the cross, they will be chained for a thousand years. They will then be released for another desperate attempt, only to be sealed in this time in the lake of fire, and forever swept out of heaven, out of eternity. Hallelujah!

What is our role in the war? Revelation 12:11 says, "They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." This is how we are to war and battle now and when he is hurled to the earth. We may be greatly privileged to give our lives for our King. Until Satan is cast out, we are to war as Paul did in Ephesians 3:10: "(God's) intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms."

I believe that this accuser of the brothers is still sneering at God in the heavenlies with some kind of words like, "See, You are a failure. Those people don't love You, they hate You, and hide from You. Even those who say they belong to You, love the world and the things in it. They don't follow what You say, they follow what I say. They don't love one another; they hate each other. They don't forgive each other; they kill one another. They don't have unity or work for it. They divide themselves from one another with religious excuses, and remain impotent. They don't believe You are in them, or else they believe that I am more powerful than You. You, God, are a failure. I do a better job than You."

Our response, my response, is to make known there in the heavenlies the truth that the gospel does work. That Christ is in me and I am in Him. I love the words of His mouth and hate the lies of Satan. I will follow God at any cost. I love Jesus because He first loved me and I will show that love and not be ashamed of Him or His words. I will forgive everyone who has ever wronged me, or ever will. I will love my enemies. I will walk and live in the unity of all my brothers and sisters who believe in Jesus, and not embrace the religious divisions of this modern Babylonian religious system.

Can you, will you join me and make this declaration in the heavenly realms to the rulers and authorities? It may cost you just like it is costing so many of our brothers and sisters around the world who are joining the band of martyrs. The worst Satan can do is take our lives, which is also the best thing that can happen to us. If he should so honor us, and allow us to honor our Master even in death, we will join that special group under the very altar in heaven.

All warfare is based on deception. When Satan foolishly rebelled, and then turned his wickedness on us, I don't think he realized that this creation of time was also the flushing device to rid eternity of him and his angels. Or also that God has been using him in a very important function in our being conformed to the image of our Creator. What a huge tactical blunder he made.

When his time comes, he will be furious. Michael and his angels will defeat Satan and cast him out of heaven. "Therefore rejoice you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."^{cxcviii}

Time has been a place to put this conflict. Time is also the place to kill it. Everything is now ready. The scroll of time in Revelation 5, which the Lion/Lamb of the tribe of Judah was worthy to open, will now be rolled up again and sealed with the enemies of God inside. "(Jesus) must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."^{cxcix}

What then should we do? We should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Love them enough to warn them, and invite them to the celebration. Give them the wedding garment as they "put on Christ" in the waters of their baptisms. And we should not fear the things that are coming on the earth. Understand what's going on, and where we fit, and how secure we are in Christ and His provision, no matter how this giant flushing device works.

We conclude in 2 Peter 3 where we see that scoffers deliberately forget the promises of his coming, and that a day is as a thousand years, and that the Lord wants no one to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. Then we read, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him."^{cc}

This entire book has been about God's first purpose - the church, the bride, preparing for the wedding by righteous deeds.^{cci} What it is, how it is formed, how it is governed, how it grows, etc. We conclude with the Kingdom of God and the glory of His church.

The Kingdom of God is the government or administration of God. It is the reign of King Jesus in every realm of life and society. Jesus is the child born to

us, the son given to us upon whose shoulders is the government.^{ccii} His Church is, “the fullness of the body of Christ that fills everything in every way.”

Chapter 14 Now What Do I Do?

If you are asking me that question, I do have a few suggestions, but first realize the question legitimately belongs to God, and I am not God. I am, however, a part of the very body of Christ Jesus, and here on earth we are like Him.²⁷ Therefore, I do have some suggestions for you that you should talk over with our Father.

First, see the reality that you are a member of the church of your city. Begin to think and act on the reality of the way church is in the mind of God. The way He thinks and feels about things is much more real than what we think and feel. His ideas are not concepts; they are the reality. What we see as reality is temporary and often anti-reality.

Every Christian you meet is your fellow member no matter what they think about you. Live the reality that there is only one church, one body by not severing your relationship with any other believer. Doing this is sometimes like walking on water. Therefore, make sure your eyes are on Jesus and not on any of the false realities hurled at you. The storm from those counterfeit realities can sink you in a heartbeat.

Second, ask God if you should be attending any intentional gatherings in the city, and on what basis. If a denominational group says you must join them and become a member, make sure that is in harmony with who and what you are and with the heart of God. If the denominational group is primarily the feet for the church of the city, and you are liver tissue, you will be very uncomfortable and may even die.

The assembling of ourselves together²⁸ in intentional gatherings might also include bible study at work, men's breakfast, women's prayer time, neighborhood prayer walks, or any of the creative ways God's people gather with Him and each other. It's all church. Especially important is the gathering of the family around the table to eat and interact. This is, I believe, the most important church gathering of all.

Third, ask God for divine appointments with other living stones with whom you are to relate in the church. If you are an elder, ask Him to show you other elders with whom you are to live in mutual submission and build relationships. Continue co-working with God to fulfill His purposes on the earth. May His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

²⁷ 1 John 4:17

²⁸ Hebrews 10:25

A Final Word Prophetic Ending

I see the church, the body of My Son, differently than you see it. Please note that the way I see things is more important than the way you see them. For example, I see you sinless and holy, while you still try to manage and deal with your sin. I see the church in its unity and diversity, city by city, and throughout the whole earth. I see by faith, the way things will be when Jesus presents the Kingdom to Me, and I am all in all. This is reality. The broken, bickering, baby-like tantrums that now are identified as church and church unity is unreal.

Live in reality. Live like who you really are. Relate to one another in the truth of the glorious reality of the one Body of Christ.

The church is growing and will fill the earth. There will be a new world order ruled by King Jesus, My Son, Whom I have installed on My holy hill of Zion. Every other kingdom and system, secular and religious, will perish. The rituals will disappear into the emptiness of their unimportance, which even now becomes more evident. True religion, visiting widows and orphans and assisting their needs, will be rewarded and blessed.

I am excited, My children, and long for the literal fulfillment of you, the Church of My Son, coming in and sharing the glory that has been His since the creation of the world. I am eagerly awaiting your marriage to My Son.

Appendix A Hearing the Voice of God

Hearing God speak to us is crucial. We need to hear His voice to do the works He has assigned for us. We need to hear His voice to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We need to hear His voice to live as Jesus lived here on earth – doing nothing on our own initiative, but moment by moment responding to His voice and direction. "A student (disciple) is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher."^{cciii} When Jesus our master teacher finishes discipling us in any area of life, we will be like Him. We will do things the way He does.

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."^{cciv}

What a beautiful promise!

What a scathing condemnation of the faithlessness, unbelief, and prayerlessness of us modern Christians. Jesus said, "Anyone who has faith in me will do..." Do you have faith in Jesus? If so, where are the seeing blind? the hearing deaf? the living dead? the walking lame? the rejoicing poor? Jesus said, "ANYONE."

We are to do what He did, the way He did it.

At this point our need is to repent! Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and turn to Jesus to follow Him. Stop following all the wrong ideas, wrong theology, wrong approaches to ministry, wrong concepts, wrong faith, and wrong approaches to life.

Every episode recorded in the Gospels between Jesus and others seems to be different on the surface, but it was always the same. He approached each individual or group in a unique manner, but always from the same source. Sometimes He taught, then healed. Sometimes He touched; sometimes He allowed them to touch. Sometimes He referred to somebody's faith, sometimes faith isn't mentioned. Sometimes He did signs and wonders, then taught, sometimes He taught first.

Do you want to do it like Jesus? Do you want to follow Him? Okay. Here is the key. Here is the pattern, method, or system Jesus always used as He Himself describes it:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son does also."^{100v}
"By myself I can do nothing. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." John 5:30
"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."^{100vi}
"He who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the World."^{100vii}
"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know who I am and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."^{100viii}
"I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence."^{100ix}
"I have not come on my own; but he sent me."^{100x}
"For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."^{100xi}

Got it? Once you see it, it's clear. Jesus said what He heard Father say; Jesus did what He saw Father do. Don't add anything or make it more complex. Jesus said what He heard Father say; Jesus did what He saw Father do.

Why did Jesus spit on the ground, make mud of the spittle and anoint the blind man's eyes?^{ccxii} Because He saw that happening. In His Spirit (the same Spirit He has placed in us) He saw this vision - He saw Father doing it, so He did it. Why did He say to the woman at the well, "Go call your husband?"^{ccxiii} Because He heard Father say it. This is the pattern and method Jesus always used. "Always" is a strong word. It is the word Jesus used.

All right, that's the way Jesus always did it. What about us? Do we do it the same way? Yes! We do it the same way Jesus did. Moment by moment we are to always follow the same pattern, method, and system.

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."^{ccxiv}

"As you (Father) sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."^{ccxv}

"But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will only speak what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."^{ccxvi} (Even the Holy Spirit He has sent to live in us, follows the same pattern as Jesus.)

Please notice carefully the following excerpts from John 10 about hearing the voice of the shepherd:

"The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice...I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep...I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice...My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."^{ccxvii}

Beloved, we are to do church, minister, do evangelism, live life, exactly the same way Jesus always did it. What we hear Jesus say, that's what we are to say. What we see Jesus do, that's what we are to do. The way Jesus says to do it, that's how we do it. That's it. That's the whole program.

What if you don't hear His voice?

If you don't hear the voice of the Good Shepherd something is wrong. It is normal for sheep to hear the voice of their shepherd. It is not normal to not hear the voice of your shepherd. A sheep that does not hear the shepherd's voice is in

the wilderness and probably lost. Call out to Jesus your shepherd and ask Him to speak to you. He will go in search for every lost sheep.

Read the Bible. The more we read His Word, the more we are in tune with Him. Sometimes He speaks to us through the scriptures, but this is not what we are talking about in "hearing His voice." The Bible helps us keep focused, instructs us in all manner of ways, and encourages us to listen to the voice of God.

If you're not hearing His voice, stop what you're doing, get still before God, and listen. Do not be afraid of silence when you are alone or when the church gathers. It is fear that causes people to fill silent spaces with noisy words and thus lose intimacy. "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) Make sure you are following Jesus, deny yourself, take up your cross and die to yourself,^{ccxviii} press on with Jesus and listen. If you still don't hear, ask Him to speak to you and tell you what's wrong.

Perhaps I've jumped ahead of you, and you are struggling with the more basic question, "Why would God want to talk with me?" I think we have all wrestled with the implications of this question.

We rationalize something like, "I know what's going on under the surface where I live and commune with myself. I know enough of who and what I am to be greatly disappointed. Even though God loves the world, does that include me? I know that under the right or wrong set of circumstances there exists in my old nature the ability to commit the worst possible sins. I know the weaknesses, the desires, and the denials that have plagued my intended walk with the Lord. Surely God would not want to talk with me."

Have you ever thought like that? Sure, we all have, but it is a lie. The inspiration for that kind of thinking comes from hell. In fact according to Romans 7:17 it is not the real us who is thinking like that.

God loves me! This is the most difficult thing for any of us to believe. In fact we can't believe it without a revelation from God Himself. Only Jesus deserved the love of our Father and by the will of Father, Jesus took my place of punishment and estrangement from God, so that I might be clothed in Christ. I now stand before our Father as righteous, holy, pure, and forgiven. I am in the Beloved no longer a sinner, but now a restored son, a saint if you will.

All of this was to restore fellowship with us, His separated children. Fellowship includes conversing. Walking together includes sharing desires and hopes and dreams. His Spirit now lives in us, not as a silent stranger, but as One Who communicates and Who guides us into all truth and tells us what is yet to come. He makes known to us what belongs to Jesus.^{ccxix}

We are the only kind of people that exist. There is no other "better" kind to whom God can talk. We are all there is. Although the image of God was ruined and destroyed in our old nature, we are being made new in the attitude of our minds, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.^{ccxx} God wants to talk with you.

The Lord speaks to us in our spirit. We also hear the voice of our own soul, and also the evil one who attempts to communicate with us every way he can. The devil is pushy and harsh, condemning and self-justifying. A sheep must learn to distinguish between the voice of the Good Shepherd and the other voices. Some believers have stopped listening because they don't want the responsibility of distinguishing the voices, or they're being a martyr or a hypocrite. If this is what you have done, repent and grow up. Jesus has a lot to say and He wants to intimately share with you moment by moment.

The Lord usually speaks to us in a "still small voice." Oh, He also speaks through events and happenings, through catastrophes and mighty shakings, but like Elijah, the closer we get to Him, the less we are concerned with the wind and fire and earthquakes, and the more we respond to the gentle whisper.^{ccxxi}

Many of us no longer hear the voice of Jesus because sometime in the past we heard His voice and did not want to do what He said. We shut it off, and don't listen anymore. We become like those lonely, isolated people who are surrounded by words and messages, but don't hear anything. When God breaks through our silence and comes to us, like Adam in the garden, we too respond, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."^{ccxxii}

We hide from God in religion, work, projects, relationships, drugs, alcohol, movements, school, sports, movies, TV, (the list is endless). The more "good" the hiding place is, the more we fool ourselves into thinking, "I'm OK with God because I'm doing something good." We forget that the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil is death.^{ccxxiii} The knowledge of evil is death. The knowledge of good is death. The greatest enemy of the best is the good. Hearing and responding to the voice of Jesus is what is best.

If you have been hiding from God and drowning out His voice, then I urge you to repent. Ask Jesus to forgive you for not listening to Him, for not doing what He asked you to do, and for not paying attention any more. Then, if it's appropriate, do what He had asked you to do before.

If you feel guilt and therefore don't want to hear His voice, get washed in Jesus' blood and forgiven. When Adam realized he was naked, he hid. Jesus clothes you with His righteousness. We are dressed in a magnificent wedding gown. "As many of you," Paul says, "as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ."^{ccxxiv} We are well dressed, and fully clothed in Christ. He likes these garments He has given us.

If you are confused, or uncertain about the voice of Jesus, go and counsel with an elder or spiritual overseer. The Lord our Shepherd has also given us gifts of under-shepherds to care for the flock of God.^{ccxxv} Go and counsel with one who is God's gift for you so that the evil one cannot confuse you and render you ineffective.

The principle of two or three witnesses is important,^{ccxxvi} especially when we hear questionable messages. Seek godly counsel.^{ccxxvii} If what you are hearing is from God, others will be hearing it also. If the evil one is trying to isolate and destroy you, the counsel of your brothers will protect you.

When you hear things that are hard, follow Jesus. Fear Him more than men. Seek His favor, rather than praise from men. He has sent you; be faithful to Him. He is with you; walk in His ways. He has loved you unto death; be secure in Him.

If you doubt that the voice you are hearing is God, apply the test of 1 John 4:1-3. Ask the spirit (the voice you are hearing) if Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is not putting the Lord to the test as Satan tried to get Jesus to do during His temptation. This is using God's provision for testing the spirits. The time is short, and I believe this is a crucial message. Most of us need help with it -- encouragement to believe God and not our own souls or understanding.

It is true! The God of the Bible lives in us and speaks with us. The world in its present form is passing away. You are precious and loved. The nations (USA, Russia, England, China, Iran, Canada, etc.) are as a drop in the bucket, or as dust on the scales. You are not. You are God's inheritance. It is time to lift up our heads for our redemption is drawing near.

In all your questions about this thing we call church ask Him. Jesus said, "I will build My church." Get out of His way and let Him do it through you.

If following the voice of Jesus is new for you, I testify to you that the fruits of this journey are wonderful and exciting. That which causes doubts and hesitation when we hear His direction is usually our own pride. A common happening is Jesus will ask us to go and say something to a stranger or go pray for them. We think, "If I do that, they'll think I'm crazy. What if this isn't the Lord?"

So what? Lots of people think you're crazy anyway. Depending on your point of view on a multitude of things, someone thinks you have left reality, especially those who don't know and love our God. You really don't have anything to lose. My counsel is that whatever you think the Lord is telling you, do it, unless it is immoral, ungodly, or unbiblical.

Was Jesus ever tempted like this? Sure He was. "He was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin."^{ccxxviii} He probably had the temptation when He was told to ask the woman at the well to call her husband, "Father, what if she isn't married? I'll look silly." Or when He heard or saw five husbands and a present illicit affair, "Maybe three or four at the most, but surely not five, and another man now?" Isn't that the way you or I might react? He was tempted like us in every way.

After lots of struggles and failures, I am committed to following my own counsel, and have done so for a number of years. To the best of my recollection, I have never approached a stranger to pray or speak a word that has not quickly resulted in tears of gratitude and the powerful working of God. That can be expected. He initiated it, I didn't. He wants to bless, and has given the direction.

Besides, if you or I hear a direction, act on it, and still feel or look silly, so what?

What difference does it make? The alternative is trying to save our life, and Jesus said we would lose our lives if we do that.^{ccxxix}

We are wise to begin each day with quality time with the Lord. I find that it's best for me to start early enough to have plenty of time with Him before the day gets started. I usually read a Psalm, a few other chapters, and then ask the Lord if there is something else He would like me to read. I read whatever comes to mind and it is usually wonderful. As I read, I ask questions and dialogue. Often I am drawn far from the preconceived plan of reading. I continue speaking with the Lord - thanking Him, presenting to Him the things that are on my heart, and asking to share the things on His heart. Then I present to Him the day's activities - asking for approval or veto of the things I want to do, and get His assignment for the day or week or long-term project. Even when He gives a longer project, we must be open to adjustments at His say-so.

For me it's crucial to gather this "manna" before the sun gets hot, before the hustle-bustle of our lives encroaches on the time set apart to be with Him. Of course we try to spend all our time in this intimate give and take fellowship, but somehow it is better for me early in the morning. When I rush the time in the morning, the rest of the day suffers, and I find myself speaking with Him less than on those days when we have had a good start.

When you and the Lord are in harmony and the communication is free flowing, ask Him about this thing we call church. Would He like you to gather in your home for church? When? For how long? Should you lead it? Should you ask someone else to help you get started? Should you also meet with others? Should you follow some guidelines? What about...Should...When...How about... - remember to thank Him for His direction, His willingness to speak with you, His love, and His mercy.

Is this too simple? too worldly? too mechanical? Does this make you seem too important? You are important. You are a vessel of almighty God who loves you, speaks to you, and desires to use you as an instrument of His love. Listen to Him, and do what He says.

If you are a leader, one of the important priorities He will probably give you is to help your people break free to hear His voice. Several times during one-on-one sessions I have had similar experiences. First we go through the Word of God in written form showing clearly that the Lord speaks to His people (we use many of the scriptures referred to here). Then after praying for God to speak to the other person in his spirit, I ask, "Well, what did He say?"

"I didn't hear anything," they respond, but Jesus assured me that He did say something.

"Yes He did," I respond, and then demand, "What did He say?"

"Oh it was just, ahhh, nothing really, just sort of a pat answer, probably I made it up," they answer.

What did He say?" I demand again. "What did you hear?"

Finally they sheepishly [we are sheep you know] admit, "I heard Him say, 'I love you.'" Then they try to keep it on a low key as if this was no big deal.

The Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Who spoke the worlds into being, Who counts the nations as a drop in a bucket, became one of us in the person of Jesus because He loves us. He died in our place because He loves us. And then, from His home within one of His children, God speaks personally and tenderly, "I love you."

Friends, this is a big deal. It is the biggest deal there is. Nothing is more important or more timely. God loves me, He lives in me, and He speaks to me. In this day of ultimate conflict and victory, we need, I need, constant communion, direction, and assurance from the One who holds the future, and is the head of this thing we call church.

APPENDIX B EKKLESIA

(The 115 uses of the word in the New Testament by categories)

Three times the word is used for the non-Christian (anti-Christian) gatherings in Ephesus when Demetrius the silversmith worked the large crowd into an anti-Paul, anti-Christian uproar.

Acts 19:32, Acts 19:39, Acts 19:41

Gary P. Bergel, President of Intercessors for America, in his article, Will the Real Church Please stand Up! states, "The Old Testament Hebrew root word *qabal*, designates an assembly of God's people, often to plan or execute war, or to deliberate and judge. The parallel New Testament Greek, *ekklesia*, indicates a called-out assembly of citizens that discuss and govern the affairs of state."

These three uses of the word are in keeping with this basic meaning even from a non-Christian perspective. As kings and priests when we congregate or assemble, it is our privilege to discuss the affairs of the state of the kingdom of God. Note that this is the only time the KJV translates the word *ekklesia* with a correct rendering, "assembly."

One time it is the "church" in the wilderness, referring to the children of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness. This is a part of Stephen's speech before the Sanhedren. He referred to the prophet Moses said would come and be like him. This was a reference to Jesus, the Messiah. Acts 7:38: "He was in the assembly (*ekklesia*) in the desert with our fathers and with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai."

Four times it is clearly a church that meets in someone's house.

1 Cor. 16:9 "Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."

Romans 16:3-5 "Greet Priscilla and Aquila.....greet also the church that meets at their house."

Col. 4:15 "and to Nympha and the church in her home."

Philemon 2 "and to the church that meets in your home."

Ten times gathering as a church

ekklesia refers to

Matt. 18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the **church**; and if he refuses to listen even to the **church**, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

1 Cor. 11:18 I hear that when you come together as a **church**, there are divisions among you

1 Cor 11:28 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the **church** of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

1 Cor 14:4,5He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the **church**.

⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the **church** may be edified.

1 Cor 14:12. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the **church**.

1 Cor 14:19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

1 Cor 14:23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues

1 Cor 14:35 for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

1 Cor 14:26,28 All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two--or at the most three--should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

Sixteen times, universal church

Matt. 16:18, And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

I have put this passage in the context of the universal church, as it is a larger area. This is the only reference like this in the New Testament.

1 Cor. 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God

1 Cor 12:28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

1 Cor 15:9 because I persecuted the church of God.

Gal 1:13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

Eph 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

Eph 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms

Eph 3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 5:23-32 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

EPH 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--³⁰ for we are members of his body.³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."³² This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Col. 1:24 and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

Heb. 12:23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven

Eighty one times, Church of the city

Acts 5:11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Acts 8:1, 8:3 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 11:22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem,

Acts 11:26 Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Acts 12:1 King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, (of Jerusalem)

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

Acts 13:1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord

Acts 14:27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done

Acts 15:3,15:4 ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

Acts 15:22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

Acts 15:30 went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter

Acts 18:22 landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church.

Acts 20:17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.

Acts 20:28 Be shepherds of the church of God, (Ephesus)

Rom 16:1 our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea.

Rom 16:23 To the church of God in Corinth

1 Cor 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth

1 Cor 4:17 what I teach everywhere in every church.

1 Cor 5:12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?

1 Cor 6:4 appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!

1 Cor. 16:19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings

2 Cor 1:1 To the church of God in Corinth,

Phil 3:6 persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Phil 4:13 you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set

out from Col 1:18 you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;

Col. 4:16 church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

1 Thess 1:1 To the church of the Thessalonians

2 Thess 1:1 To the church of the Thessalonians

1 Tim 3:5 If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

1 Tim 5:16,17 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor,

James 5:14 He should call the elders of the church to pray over him

3 John 1 They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help

from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

^{3JN 1:9} I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

Revelation 2,3 Church at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea

Appendix C THE GANG OF JESUS

Dear fellow members of the gang of Jesus,

Our leader used the word “ecclesia” for “gathering, fellowship, church.” This was not a religious term. In Acts 19:32 and 41 the riotous, anti-Christian, political gathering is called “church” or “ecclesia.” I propose that a more understandable and accurate translation or interpretation of the word “ecclesia/church” for today is “gang.”

Gangs are always people, not buildings. Gangs give identity. Gangs give security. Gangs set you apart from every other segment of society or other gang. Gangs are your highest allegiance. Your gang is your family, your hope, your identity 24/7. Gang members honor and obey their leaders. Leaders earn their leadership by risking their lives for the gang. Gang members also risk their lives for the gang; they have given their life to the gang.

Let's use the term “gang” for church. We are Jesus' gang. Not Paul's, not Cephas's, not Apollos's, but Christ's. Not Luther's, not General Booth's, not Wesley's, not Calvin's, not Arminius's, but Christ's. Not Presbyterian, not Pentecostal, not Charismatic, not Calvary Chapel, not Word of Faith, not Baptist, not anti, pro, or non-denominational – we are Jesus' gang, we are His Body.

Enough turf wars. Enough in-fighting. Enough petty squabbles. Enough distractions. Enough lesser causes. Enough not listening to the leader. Enough following our own desires. Enough bickering.

It is time for a gang war. Actually, it is time to realize we are already in a gang war unto death. The enemy has used his sneaky methods to intoxicate us American gang members. He has made us ineffective and impotent. He has increased wickedness so that the love of most has grown cold. The snake is a worthy opponent – worthy of destruction in the lake of fire prepared for him.

Present yourself before Jesus, our all-powerful leader. Thank Him for His grace, and ask him what your assigned task is. Re-think your original gang vows in which you pledged yourself to life and death in Him and for Him. Either renew those vows, revoke them, or prepare to be spit out of His mouth. It is time.

Initiation

I have heard that to join some gangs you have to kill someone. Others require acts of violence, daring, and miscellaneous law breaking. All of these “required duties” show a commitment and loyalty to the gang, which proves the initiates sincerity.

In Jesus' gang the initiation rite also requires death – yours. You must prove your commitment and loyalty to Jesus and the gang and show your sincerity by dying in the waters of baptism. This is not just some symbolic rite. It is a genuine spiritual death with Jesus on the cross. When you go down in the waters of baptism, it is like a time warp where you literally die with Jesus on the cross. When you come out, you are rising with Him also on resurrection morning. Jesus' gang is only for those who have died and been given a new life.

Jesus' gang is for those with this new life only. If you insist on remaining a "sinner", you are ineligible for gang membership. In gang gatherings of various kinds and configurations, we encourage one another to love and good works. We provoke and challenge each other to live this life of Christ – by constantly reckoning the old one dead. It is illegal for gang members to try to live in the gang as if they were still just old sinners saved by grace. Gang life is a faith walk for overcomers.

Meal

The night before He was murdered for us, our leader took some bread and told His leaders to eat it, as it was His body. He then took a cup of wine and told them to drink, as it was His blood. This is His blood of the covenant He made with us. He has now given us this blood contract that says His laws are in our hearts and written on our minds, and our sins are not remembered. He said whenever we did this, to remember Him.

I was a Chaplain for a younger man who had drunk human blood at a Rock Concert. It was a satanic ritual. He was besieged by a very deep-seated evil that accosted him for years. As we take part in our gang meal, we are receiving an evil defying deep-seated righteousness and peace from God.

Colors

Every color has a meaning for the gang. Our gang colors can only be a rainbow. Red is for the Blood of our Leader, shed for all of us - a great color for us. Blue is also good and symbolizes the heavens where our true home is. Then there is yellow for the brightness of His light shining; orange for the tanginess and fruitfulness of His creation; purple for royalty honoring the King of us kings; green for all growth. The gang colors can only be a rainbow.

The rainbow that encircles His Throne in Heaven is ours. The covenant rainbow that He placed in the clouds belongs to us. There are some other groups smaller than the gang of Jesus that have taken the rainbow as their symbol. It belonged to Jesus' gang long before they started using it. If you should be displaying the rainbow and be misidentified as one of the other groups, you have a great opportunity to witness and to be humbled.

Logo

Historically our logo is a cross. This is the most universally known and accepted symbol of Christianity. It is a great insignia, showing the love of God that drew Him to earth and to a cursed death on a painful, public, humiliating Roman torture device. The cross is my reminder that I am to take up my cross and follow Him, perhaps also to a painful, public, humiliating death. This is a great emblem indeed for our gang.

However, our militancy has put an "in your face" facet to the cross that is not compatible for our gang strategy. The crusades and inquisition both used the cross as an unchristian symbol of power with a demand of subservience. Even now we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with a gusto that suggests a superiority and smugness.

I propose we change the words of the hymn and use "with a towel from Jesus" instead of "with the cross of Jesus." Try it and see if it fits for you. We are

going to war, no, we are in a war. We will battle for the souls of men with a servant's towel for washing feet. This is our kind of gang.

Do you want to join?

Appendix D

A Parable [30 – 2008 ad]

A great King defeated the cruel and wicked tyrant in a land of slavery and poverty. The people were rescued from their bondage; however, the King left the tyrant in the land. The cruel tyrant worked hard to keep people in slavery and poverty, but now he had no authority. He could dominate people only if they were afraid of him and gave in to their fears.

Each person now had the right to choose allegiance to the King or to stay in his miserable condition. The King said he wanted a people, a beloved family that loved him. He called his people, "Eccle," and said that everything he did would be for his Eccle People.

One day the King returned to his own homeland, which was also where the Eccle People would go. He promised to return. As he left, the great King gave gifts to his people and asked them to tell the enslaved people about him. The great King would also make them Eccle People, if they wanted.

The Eccle grew and grew. Everything the great King was doing was for their benefit, yet he didn't come back. After a while the cruel tyrant, who hated the King and the Eccle People, came up with a plan to ruin the Eccle and turn the people against one another and away from the King. "Then," he thought, "I can have my own Eccle, and be like the King."

The tyrant got the Eccle People to fight with each other. He had some of his slaves infiltrate the Eccle and pretend to love the King. Since the King hadn't come back, the Eccle had relaxed. They started letting people into their midst who wanted to love the King, yet also keep serving the tyrant. Trouble. Trouble. Trouble.

This is what happened: Over time, the Eccle allowed the tyrant to steal some of the treasure of the King's blessing. From time to time the King would send a champion to tell the Eccle to take back the stolen treasure. Many of the Eccle people listened to the champion and reclaimed the treasure, but others would not. The ones who listened lifted up a banner to the treasure stating, "If you want

this treasure, come here." Soon, however, the banner got dirty and its message proclaimed, "Stay Out! This is for lost treasure seekers only!"

Instead of correcting the Eccle, it was now divided. Of course, the old Eccle People were right because they were the old Eccle. Of course, the new Eccle People were right because they re-accepted the King's gift. The Eccle began to fight with themselves. They even killed each other in the name of Eccle truth.

Then some of the Eccle People noticed that the fifteenth teaching of the King was being taught improperly. Of course they formed the "Eccle of the Fifteenth - The true and unadulterated Eccle." Again and again this happened until there were hundreds of Eccle groups instead of the one Eccle of the King. The tyrant was very happy, and got to stay in the cities.

Then - just recently in Eccle timing - certain Eccle People began using some of the King's parting gifts. Others said, "Don't do that! Those gifts were only for the time when the King went away. We have everything we need today, and we certainly don't want that anymore." Now there were "Giftmatics" in various Eccle groups as well as Non-giftmatics, and of course, many new "True Eccles" were formed.

Now, today, there is trouble. The King has been telling his servants he is coming back for his Eccle. He is raising an army to crush the tyrant. The King wants his Eccle People in each city to throw out the tyrant. It's incredible, but the King actually thinks there is only one Eccle in each city.

What can we do?

SUGGESTION ONE: The leaders of the different Eccle groups can turn away from their pet doctrines and points of division, and turn towards the great King. As each gets closer to the King, he also will get closer to the other leaders. Then they could put the Eccle People in the city back together the way the King intends.

The problem with this suggestion is that as the leaders get close to each other, they will see each other more clearly. Some of the leaders talk funny, others look funny, a few smell funny and the majority think funny. The tyrant will work hard to make them stare at each other, and then, once their eyes are off the great King, the tyrant will keep them divided so he can stay on in the city and continue to do whatever he wants.

SUGGESTION TWO: We can petition the King to send some "hit men" to kill the leaders. Then the people who haven't been trained to hate the other Eccle groups will come together. The great King can then appoint new leaders if he wants.

The problem with this solution is that no one wants to die this way. To die for the great King would be glorious, but to be put to death by him to be gotten out of his way? Granted, he might follow this plan with or without our petitions, and who knows how many levels of Eccle leadership he might remove.

SUGGESTION THREE: We can just forget about it and let the great King take care of it himself. Each of us can say, "I don't want to deal with it. I choose not to dirty my pure doctrine by mixing with those fools who teach:

the King will whisk us away from all trouble."

we will bring the King back by our great faith and works."

the King isn't really concerned about these cities."

(Place your check mark at the correct answer.)

ARE THERE ANY OTHER SUGGESTIONS?

Appendix E (The Name)

The Name

Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Father...holy be your name."

In the Lord's prayer, He said, "I have kept them safe by that name you gave me."

Solomon said, "I have built a temple for Name of the Lord."

Now, according to Paul, "God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."

As the third temple of God, we living stones are also the house of the Lord and his Name is upon us. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with (in) him."

In Exodus 34, God responded to Moses' request to see His glory by "proclaiming(ed) His Name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.'"

Then follows in this same chapter God's promise to bring them to the land and the following warning, "Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you." (The Gibeonites were that snare.) "Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, and cut down their Asherah poles (symbols of the goddess Ashera.) Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God."

Ashera is the Caananite name for the fertility goddess sometimes called “The Queen of Heaven.” Ashtoreth another form, Isis the Egyptian name, Artemis the Syrian version, and Diana the Greek name. These goddesses were worshipped through sexual rituals (pornography and prostitution.) Their symbols include bunny rabbits, known for their sexual appetites, which lay colored eggs. The pagan religion focused on the death and annual springtime resurrection of Tammuz. There was a great conflict in all of this between the pagans and the early Christians. We celebrate the victory of Jesus over sin, death, and hell while the pagans have their springtime orgies in memory of Tammuz.

The Teutonic dawn goddess of fertility was known by variations of the ancient word for spring, Eastre. She is part of this category of pornographic, pagan, goddesses. Her name has been attached to the great victory celebration of our God, whose name is Jealous. This is as ludicrous as referring to your wedding anniversary as “Harlot’s Day.” Our holy covenant unions are to be pictures of Jesus and His Bride, and calling them “Harlot’s Day” is much the same as calling His Resurrection, Easter. I believe this situation is a spiritual doorway for the epidemic of pornography among Christian leaders.

“Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.”

He who is wise will consider these things. If the Spirit confirms this message to you and you care about the glory of His Name, then:

1. apologize for desecrating Jesus victory by calling it after a pagan whore goddess, and
2. start referring to the day of His victory as, Resurrection Day.

ⁱ Matt. 3:10

ⁱⁱ Romans 8:28, 29

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 14:11

^{iv} A Greek English Lexicon, Arndt, Gingrich

^v James 1:2

^{vi} 1 Tim. 1:9

^{vii} Gal. 3:24

^{viii} John 8:36

^{ix} Rom. 6:14

^x 2 Tim. 2:15

^{xi} Matthew 20:25

^{xii} Isaiah 28:6

^{xiii} John 17:21

^{xiv} 1 Cor. 11:21

^{xv} Isaiah 7:3

^{xvi} Isaiah 8:1

^{xvii} Isaiah 8:18

^{xviii} Isaiah 20:3, 4

^{xix} Ezekiel 4:1-5

^{xx} Ezekiel 4:6ff

^{xxi} Ezekiel 12:1-6

^{xxii} Ezekiel 12:15-27

^{xxiii} Hosea 3:1

^{xxiv} Hosea 14:4

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- xxv Ephesians 5:22-33
 - xxvi Ephesians 5:32
 - xxvii 1 Cor. 3:10-15
 - xxviii 2 Tim. 3:16
 - xxix John 10:28
 - xxx Ephesians 1:11-14
 - xxxi 1 Cor. 10:12
 - xxxii 1 Peter 5:8
 - xxxiii Hebrews 6:4-6
 - xxxiv Acts 2:38
 - xxxv 1 Peter 3:21
 - xxxvi Ephesians 5:26
 - xxxvii Deut. 6:4
 - xxxviii Gen. 1:26
 - xxxix Matt. 28:19
 - xl John 10:30
 - xli 1 John 5:20
 - xlii Romans 3:24, 28
 - xliiii Galatians 2:16
 - xliiv James 2:24
 - xlv John 1:1-3
 - xlvi John 1:14
 - xlvii Matt. 8:20
 - xlviii Heb. 2:14
 - xlix 2 Tim. 2:15
 - l 1 John 2:12-14
 - li Jim Rutz, Mega Shift, paper version, chapter four, section seven, page 121.
 - lii Rev. 20:10
 - liii Col. 1:15-20
 - liiv Eph. 3:11
 - lv Gen. 11:6
 - lvi John 17:21
 - lvii 1 Cor 12:7
 - lviii 1 Cor. 12:32
 - lix "Answers" Jan – Mar 2007 p 27
 - lx Ephesians 3:11
 - lxi 1 Peter 4:17
 - lxii Matt. 19:29
 - lxiii 2 Chron. 20:21
 - lxiv 1 Samuel 30:24
 - lxv Hebrews 11:10
 - lxvi Psalm 46:4
 - lxvii Psalm 87:3
 - lxviii Ephesians 4:1
 - lxix Ephesians 4:2
 - lxx Matthew 13:44
 - lxxi 2 Kings 6:25
 - lxxii Matthew 7:21
 - lxxiii Matthew 16:11
 - lxxiv Matthew 23:3
 - lxxv Ecclesiastes 1:9
 - lxxvi James 2:24
 - lxxvii Romans 3:28
 - lxxviii The Life Model. Friesen, Wilder, Bierling, Koepke, and Poole. p110
 - lxxix Ephesians 4:16

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- lxxx 2 Timothy 2:15
 - lxxxi See appendix A for a complete listing of the “ekklesia” verses and categories.
 - lxxxii Matthew 16:13-17.
 - lxxxiii Ephesians 2:20
 - lxxxiv Ephesians 2:21,22
 - lxxxv Matthew 16:18
 - lxxxvi 2 Samuel 6:1-8
 - lxxxvii 1 Peter 2:5
 - lxxxviii Numbers 33:52
 - lxxxix 1 Kings 3:4
 - xc 1 Kings 3:3
 - xc1 1 Samuel 9:19-24
 - xcii Mark 13:9
 - xciii Acts 20:28
 - xciv Ephesians 1:22,23
 - xcv Acts 6:1-6
 - xcvi 2 Corinthians 8:16-21
 - xcvii Ephesians 4:11,12
 - xcviii 1 Corinthians 12:31
 - xcix Matthew 20:25,26
 - c 1 Peter 5:1-4
 - ci Acts 20:28
 - cii Acts 15:28
 - ciii 1 John 2:27; 1 Corinthians 2:12; John 14:26; etc.
 - civ Hebrews 13:17, 1; Corinthians 11:1, etc.
 - cv Ephesians 4:11-14
 - cvi Acts 18:19
 - cvii Acts 18:26
 - cviii Acts chapter 19
 - cix 1 Timothy 3:1
 - cx 1 Thessalonians 5:23
 - cx1 1 Corinthians 11:17
 - cxii 1 Corinthians 11:20
 - cxiii 1 Corinthians 11:29
 - cxiv Amos 5:24
 - cxv Isaiah 1:16
 - cxvi Matthew 15:8,9
 - cxvii John 4:24
 - cxviii Matthew 6:9-13
 - cxix Luke 11:2-4
 - cxx Hebrews 10:25
 - cxx1 Leviticus 23:3
 - cxxii See pp for an explanation of high places
 - cxxiii Matthew 10:17; 23:23:34; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12
 - cxxiv Leviticus 23:41
 - cxxv Deuteronomy 14:26a
 - cxxvi Deuteronomy 14:26b
 - cxxvii John 10:10
 - cxxviii Romans 8:20,21
 - cxxix John 19:30
 - cxxx Romans 4:24
 - cxxxi Philippians 2:12
 - xxxii Ephesians 2:14
 - xxxiii Rev. 7:9
 - xxxiv Romans 16:16

1 Cor. 16:20
2 Cor. 13:12
1 Thess. 5:26
cxxxv 1 Peter 5:14
cxxxvi Galatians 3:28
cxxxvii Ephesians 2:15,16
cxxxviii Rev. 18:4
cxxxix Psalm 90:4
cxl 2 Peter 3:8
cxli John 1:29
cxlii Haggai 2:3
cxliiii Haggai 2:9
cxliv 1 Corinthians 3:16
cxlv 1 Kings 6:7
cxlvi 1 Kings 6:38
cxlvii Matthew 22:45
cxlviii Daniel 9:27
cxlix 1 Peter 2:5
cl Rev. 11:2,3; 12:14; 13:5.
cli 2 Chronicles 7:1
clii John 17:9;20
cliii Matthew 25:61
cliv John 2:19
clv Hebrews 8:13
clvi 2 Chronicles 8:11
clvii Romans 8:21,22
clviii John 15:19
clix John 16:33
clx Colossians 2:15
clxi Psalm 24:1
clxii 1 John 2:15
clxiii Romans 12:2, J.B. Phillips
clxiv Matthew 13:22
clxv Romans 6:3,4
clxvi Romans 7:20
clxvii 1 Peter 5:8
clxviii Ephesians 6:1- - 18
clxix 1 John 1:7
clxx Romans 7:24,25
clxxi Romans 7:20
clxxii Galatians 2:20
clxxiii Ephesians 2:6
clxxiv Ephesians 1:20
clxxv Colossians 3:1-4
clxxvi Philippians 3:12,13
clxxvii 2 Corinthians 5:17
clxxviii Romans 8:14
clxxix John 4:23,24
clxxx Psalm 1:5
clxxxi Dictionary.com
clxxxii James 1:27
clxxxiii 1 Timothy 5:4
clxxxiv John 10:10
clxxxv Dictionary.com
clxxxvi Romans 6:11

clxxxvii Luke 18:11

clxxxviii Ephesians 1:18-23

clxxxix Matthew 18:20

cx Hebrews 1;3

cxci 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1

cxcii Romans 8:28

cxciiii Acts 2:20

cxciiv Revelation 6:14

cxci v Job 8:27 - 31

cxci vi John 1:4

cxci vii Colossians 2:15

cxci viii Revelation 12:12

cxci ix 1 Corinthians 15:25

cc 2 Peter 3:10-14

cci Revelation 19:7

ccii Isaiah 9:6

cciii Luke 6:40

cciv John 14:12-14

ccv John 5:19

ccvi John 6:38

ccvii John 8:26b

ccviii John 8:28, 29

ccix John 8:38a

ccx John 8:42

ccxi John 12:49, 50

ccxii John 9:6

ccxiii John 4:16

ccxiv John 20:21

ccxv John 17:18, 19

ccxvi John 16:13

ccxvii Verses 2,3,4,7,16,27

ccxviii Matthew 16:24

ccxix John 16:13, 14

ccxx Ephesians 4:22-24

ccxxi 1 Kings 19:12

ccxxii Genesis 3:10

ccxxiii Genesis 2:17

ccxxiv Galatians 3:27

ccxxv 1 Peter 5:2-4

ccxxvi Deuteronomy 17:6

ccxxvii Proverbs 8:14; 15:22

ccxxviii Hebrews 4:15

ccxxix Matthew 16:25