

JESUS AND HIS CHURCH



Dedication

These ministries are dedicated to those dear Saints who shared and participated in them week by week at our meetings or online and encouraged me in the faith, especially our dear sister Chris who we feared was lost but by grace is found.

The ministries were given on Sunday mornings between April 2012 and February 2014

The **original mp3** versions are available from: <https://archive.org/details/1.Apr222012Ministry1>

Please send comments or corrections through <http://theministrypage.wordpress.com/> (thanks in advance).



Location of the Churches in Asia

Rev 21:5 And he that sat upon the throne said, **Behold, I make all things new.** And he said unto me, **Write: for these words are true and faithful.** **Rev 21:6** And he said unto me, **It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.** **Rev 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things;** and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. **Rev 21:8** But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

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Introduction

We live in the age of the Institutional Church. Wrapped in the shrouds accumulated through the ages, it has lost its original form and power. Like Miss Havisham in Dickens "Great expectations", she sits in her wedding rags a grim travesty of a bride. The growing attraction is the Whore of Babylon, who increasingly looks far more interesting than the Old Church.

Not that all Churches are on the downgrade, yet as we see, in the addresses to the seven Churches, only two of the seven escape a rebuke and those two are clinging on by the skin of their teeth in poverty and tribulation.

Do not be misled by the seeming success of the mega-Churches in our day. Success is not measured by size but by faithfulness. The message to all seven Churches is to be "Overcomers", conquerors. We can only become hyper-conquerors through Christ. *Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors (hyper conquerors) through him that loved us.*

This series is given to warn and encourage the Church of Christ. It is not exhaustive and there has been much written and no doubt better written and better preached. But this is the experience of our day, our Church and the Churches of our day. It is a snapshot of the issues that we contend with in the early 21st Century and it is our part in the battle, in our country.

We have made comment on current events which have been used to illustrate points in the Bible texts. Looking back over these pages, we observe the same old sins wearing new clothes. But still the same old sins. It is also a great shame to the Churches, that things which were considered sin only 20 years ago, are now warmly embraced by the Institutional Churches as acceptable and normal. How have the mighty fallen!

I have used many different translations of the scripture where I considered that it would improve the sense of the verse. I make no apology for not slavishly using the King James Version (KJV) as you will find out by reading these ministries. I advise all teachers to get a working knowledge of the original Hebrew and Greek autographs which have been used to identify the most appropriate translations.

Stay blessed,

Mike Winnett 1st February 2014

Versions:

- CEV Contemporary English Version
- Darby John Nelson Darby Translation
- ERV Easy to Read Version
- Geneva 1587 Version
- GNB Good News Translation
- GW God's Word
- ISV International Standard Version
- KJV Kings James Version
- LEB Lexham English Version
- RSV Revised Standard Version

Scripture quotations are in italic script.

Whose Church is it anyway?

Part 1. Joh 17:22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: *Eph 4:13* Till we all come in the **unity of the faith**, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Christian unity is the goal of Jesus, so what are we to make of the various denominations (denomination literally means division) that we see around us? They cannot surely claim to be the work of Christ whose aim is unity. *1Co 14:33* For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints. Why have divisions come about and how are we to view them?

I heard the other week a statement that the Church must become relevant for the age we live in (Post-modern era). When people use the word Church in the context of "relevance" it shows that they have no idea of what the Church is. The term **relevant** cannot be applied to the Church which is a body of people. The Church can either be faithful or unfaithful. A Church may be growing in a community or declining in numbers. Christ is always relevant to our lives in the world and the Gospel is always relevant but the Church as the body of believers has a duty to be faithful not relevant.

When people talk about relevance what they mean is, making Christianity more appealing to the times in which we live. This will invariably mean a compromise in the message and secularising an unpopular message or even leaving it out as the Alpha course does with sin. Sin is presented primarily in terms of "messed up lives," of unhappiness and other problems, but never clearly in terms of offending God and breaking His law. Only the evil consequence, not the guilt of sin, is emphasized. Why do we need new "methods"? I believe it is because we lack the gifts to the body of Christ (Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers). That's where we should start seeking help and because the early Church ways are not working is not the reason to change direction.

I will state for now that the Church existed in the Older Testament *Act 7:38* **This is he, that was in the Church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina**, and that the Church is equivalent to the congregation of Israel (or the Jewish people). When the northern kingdoms (under Jeroboam) apostatised after the death of Solomon, Judah, the southern kingdom (under Rehoboam) maintained the covenant and it is from the name Judah that we get the term Jew. I will come back in more detail on this in a later ministry. We could say for now that Judaism is Older Testament Christianity without the fullness of the Spirit.

Jesus comes across two sects of Judaism in his own day. The Pharisees and the Sadducees. Both of these sects had started to reinterpret the scripture and place their own emphasis upon it. The Sadducees denied the immortality of the soul. *Act 23:8* For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. The Pharisees were like the Exclusive Brethren in their actions, *Luk 11:39* And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness (Read section). According to Smith's Bible Dictionary, "The fundamental principle of the Pharisees...is that...there was an oral law to complete and explain the written law, given to Moses". The Pharisees didn't really want to be good; they just wanted to look good

We note that Jesus did not avoid contact with the sects, rather He challenged the followers publicly. He didn't dwell on what they had in common but what they differed upon, and He didn't agree to disagree on the differences. Error is to be exposed and dealt with. We also see that He directed them to the truth of scripture and made NO attempt to support any sect or align with them and He did not support their traditions.

Now Jesus did not devote a huge part of His ministry focusing on dealing with heretics and He did not go out of His way to create a statement of faith to make clear to His followers the difference between true Christianity and the false sects of His day. He was not diverted from His preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and Heaven. Neither Jesus nor His Apostles developed doctrinal statements or articles of faith to confront the apostates and it wasn't the Apostles who developed the "Apostle's Creed". So we must ask, are creeds and articles of faith a work of the Spirit or man and have some elevated them above scripture?

Founded on Christ not man

Part 2. *Mat 16:18 I tell you that you are a stone (πετρα) but on this rock (πετρος) I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

What was the Church and what was its purpose? I will start by defining the word Church in the light of the NT usage of the OT. Paul the Apostle used the Septuagint (LXX) Greek translation of the Hebrew OT in at least 51 citations of the Scriptures. I make this point to show his familiarity with it. To any Jew reading this translation, the word Church (greek ekklesia) was a translation of the Hebrew word קהל qahal

The Hebrew word 'qahal' comes from a root meaning to 'call' hence the congregation of Israel are the 'called' of Israel'. This idea of being 'called' equates with the Greek word ekklesia and as a result the Greek version of the OT uses ekklesia for qahal. *Deu 31:30 And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation (Church) of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended. Jdg 20:2 And the chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly (Church) of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.* This translation occurs many times and I labour the point because the word 'Church' was not a NT invention, *Act 7:38 This is he, that was in the Church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.* Definition: the Church is people called to serve God, not a public building or a human institution.

There are some who say that the Church was born at Pentecost but this is nonsense. It fails to see the historic linkage between Christ's people in all times. Paul uses the analogy of an olive tree to show the relationship of Christians to the older testament believers. *Rom 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;* It is quite clear that we Christians were grafted in to an ancient root and that is our heritage. The unbeliever was broken out and the believing gentile grafted in. We are Abraham's seed, *Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* And we shall sit with Abraham, *Mat 8:11 And I*

say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

On a prophetic note I observe that this continuity shows that the true Israel never ceased to exist. *Rom 9:6 For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:* The Jewish Nations scattered over the face of the earth come to Christ the same way as we do and may be grafted back into the historic “olive tree”. *Rom 11:2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.* The idea that history pivots on the restoration of an unbelieving secular nation (State) of Israel is not taught by the apostle.

When Jesus says that He will build His Church, He does not say “from this day forward”. When Jesus speaks to Peter, it is clear that the Church already exists (compare Mat 16:18 and Mat 18:17). His Church was planned in eternity *Eph 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.* It is manifest in time. When did it first appear? When it called its first member.

The rituals and sacrifices of the ages did nothing to remove sins, *Heb 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.* They did however anticipate and direct us to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It was through Christ alone that the Church in all ages was brought back to its Creator.

We set out to define the Church. Here are just some of the words used to describe the Church: God’s people, the Church of the firstborn, the congregation of Israel, the Assembly of the saints, The Body of Christ, Bride of Christ, Church of God, Congregation of saints, Flock of God, General assembly of the firstborn, His Kingdom, Household of God, New Jerusalem, Pillar and ground of the truth, Place of God’s throne, Spiritual house, Temple of the Living God. The Church is the body of God’s believing people through time and eternity, not separated by temporal death, united in Christ, glorying in God the Creator. Never again think of the Church as a building of bricks. It is people.

What was the Church’s purpose among themselves?

Part 3. *Luk 24:46 And (Jesus) said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

There in the great commission is part of the purpose of the congregation, the Church. The believers however may view their purpose as twofold. **1. Their purpose in and amongst themselves** and **2. Their purpose as they work outside in the world.** Let us examine the first of these.

*Act 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were **baptized**: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' **doctrine** and **fellowship**, and in **breaking of bread**, and in **prayers**.* Firstly they didn’t hang about waiting years for baptism. They did it because it was the first testimony of conversion, *1Pe 3:21...baptismnot the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God...* If you enter into the life of the congregation that is the first act. Someone must explain to me how a person who refuses to be baptised, refuses to obey Christ can ever be a believer and want to be part of the body

of Christ when they live in open rejection of His word ? Mark 16:16. How can they have a place in the body of Christ? Christ is not an add-on to life, He is the focus of life.

The congregation or Church started by obeying Christ and “**continued steadfastly**” engaging in the apostles teaching (doctrine). There are two words here that I draw your attention to. Firstly, the word **steadfastly** or diligently. It was not a matter of indifference or inconvenience. It was not a “Sunday” thing or occasional reading of a daily text. They had no Bible! This was live, at the feet, God seeking information gathering. It was a precious thing that they did from a desiring heart. Secondly, it concerned teaching or doctrine. I have come across so many people who call themselves believers who hate the word “doctrine”. They view it as restrictive and harsh. To those I say, how can you have a place in the body of Christ when you have an aversion to the word of God.

This congregation of believers enjoyed “fellowship” (κοινωνία koinonia). It means general sharing, commonality and charity *Rom 15:26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution (koinonia) for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.* The congregation or Church were not Sunday servants who met for one hour a week, they were engaged in far more activities.

They “broke bread” together as a regular act of fellowship. This is not simply the Lord’s Table but sharing a meal together. *Pro 15:17 A simple meal with love is better than a feast where there is hatred.* If believers cannot eat together, then there is something truly wrong with their relationships. It is not about outward signs of association, it is about true hearts knit together *Col 2:2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.* Divisions in Churches among the people is the outworking of the inner absence of unity or one heart.

Secondly we look at **prayer**. The praying Church. The Church with a common purpose and an open channel to heaven. A core subject of prayer can be seen in the “Model Prayer” (Mat 6:9ff). Other prayer issues are *Mat 5:44 enemies, them that hate you, them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, Mat 9:38 labourers into his harvest. Php 1:9 that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; 2Th 3:1 that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: 1Ti 2:1 for all men; For kings, authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Jas 5:16 pray one for another, that ye may be healed.* There are of course, many more subjects for prayer. **(Have you a prayer list?)**

The subject of prayer both individually and as a body, important though it be, is a subject for another ministry. D L Moody the evangelist said, “I’d rather be able to pray than to be a great preacher. Jesus Christ never taught His disciples how to preach but only how to pray”. Amen to that!

What was the Church’s purpose in the world? 1

Part 4. Eph 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.

There in the great commission is part of the purpose of the congregation, the Church. The believers however may view their purpose as twofold. 1. Their purpose in and amongst themselves and **2. Their purpose as they work outside in the world.** Let us examine the second of these.

I remember in my early years as a Christian reading Ian Paisley's criticism of "The Living Bible: The Livid Libel of the Scriptures of the Truth". He condemned the new translation as libellous. I also read another quote that Christians are "the only Bible many people ever read". Its true because the first point of contact with Jesus and His word is generally YOU. What do they see? A Livid Libel or a Living Bible?

I recall an incident in the life of Robert Cleaver Chapman ("A brother indeed" p56.) where a single act of kindness showed so much of Christ that it led a man to forgiveness. Jesus shone through the man. Yet for so many people, they see Christianity as a devious, hypocritical and miserable, joyless existence and that is how it is shown in the media. I can only agree that that is how many people portray it. Yet those are the very things that Christ condemned. *Mat 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.*

Christ condemnation of this type of display is forthright. *Mat 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: ... ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: ...to make one proselyte.... ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.blind guides,hypocrites! have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.are full of extortion and excess. ... whited sepulchres,Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers..... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

You see, the Scribes and the Pharisees were not condemned for their Biblical views but for their **lifestyles**. *Mat 23:2....Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.* This dissonance between ideology and practice, between what we know and what we do, is at the root of the poor testimony of Christ to the world. This certainly fails to display the "manifold wisdom of God" as our headline text says.

We might say that the Pharisees gave religion a bad name as do many today who profess Christianity. Yet what do we mean by Religion? The word is derived from the Latin ligāre (to bind, tie; as a ligature) and is something we bind ourselves to. If someone asks what religion you are, what do you say? There is unhealthy religion, *Gal 1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it: and there is pure religion, Jas 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Our religion is, or rather should be, helping the afflicted (charity) and keeping the world from messing us up (piety). It is not Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Brethren, Anglican and so on. I have no allegiance whatsoever to these man made institutions to which men bind themselves. True religion is Christ working through us make us kind and decent people but also forthright and honest people.

So just what does this generation teach principalities and powers? Divorce resolves marriage problems, Homosexuality is no longer a sin, psychological counselling is a working alternative to the new birth, evolution was the Creator's method, the virgin birth did not happen, the Bible is the same as any other book, all religions lead to God and so on. What are we teaching by this? We are teaching principalities and powers, that today, we are on the same side as the devil? May the God of Heaven deliver us from these evils and the people who teach them.

What was the Church's purpose in the world? 2

Part 5. *Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

We continue to examine the purpose of the Church in the world. I am not sure whether it is an excuse for the impotent state of Churches today but there are those who say that the gifts of the spirit were only a phenomenon of that past day and ceased when the canon of scripture was confirmed. However, If I had no contact with Church history and alone on a desert island, found a Bible, would it give me that view? The answer is obviously no. The idea that gifts have ceased comes from the heart of men not the heart of God.

The early believers knew God's word and required the power to be effective in its use. *Act 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, Act 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and **that signs and wonders** may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.*

I think that much of our problem today is that we do not want to be on the frontline of faith, we do not want gifts to show the power of Christ and that we would sooner have others do it for us. What we want in the 21st century are the benefits of Christ without the Witness to Christ. We want a secret club and invisible society because the cost of the alternative is unthinkable. We confine our religious exercise to occasionally saying grace and reading a few texts in the bathroom. Who are we kidding? I am sure that a lot of people are waiting to hear "well done good and faithful servant" but will hear "cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness".

The early Church wanted the headlines every day but it came at a price. The new disciples had, I estimate, about 3 years to consolidate before persecution broke out. *Act 8:1 Saul approved of putting Stephen to death. On that day widespread persecution broke out against the Church in Jerusalem. Most believers, except the apostles, **were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.*** Why did persecution break out? It was **NOT** because the believers were silent or passive. It was because *Act 6:7 ... the word of God increased.* They were in open conflict with the religions of their day but this served to disperse them and begin the second growth phase in Samaria.

What was the believers task? Conversions or witness? Did they measure their success against numbers in congregations, "bums on seats" as they say today? That clearly was not their task. They were to be martyrs or "*witnesses of me to all nations*" (Μαρτύριον marturion whence martyr a testimony, witness). That doesn't mean that all disciples will get burnt at the stake but persecution is

par for the course. The increase in numbers was the responsibility of *God 1Co 3:7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but **God that giveth the increase.***

What is the content of their message? Our message is neatly summarised in Paul's short sermon in Athens, the so called cradle of democracy. The message sits between two pillars of truth, the book ends of the faith. One that **the Earth was created** and the second that **God will Judge it** by the resurrected Man Jesus. *Act 17:24 God that made the worldBecause he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Read all).* From Creation to judgement, that is our witness of Christ, alpha to omega.

Remove the Creator, you remove the Lord of heaven, then there is no need to repent and then no need of Christ, which is precisely the message of many Churches today. In fact it did not take long for the Churches to decline in the days of the Apostles. By about AD 90, only two Churches in Revelation, **Smyrna** and **Philadelphia** do not get a rebuke from Christ, the other five have:

- Left their first love
- Ones with doctrine of Balaam,
- Jezebel with immorality permitted,
- Imperfect works,
- A lukewarm attitude,
- Wretchedness,
- Spiritual blindness,
- Spiritual nakedness.

Christ did not judge them on the basis of their hymn singing, worship leaders, quality of preaching, its all about their works and what they do. I'll leave you with a something to think about. "How do you think Christ views your Church and what do you think that He would say to us?"

How was the Church ordered?

Part 6. *1Co 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

Today we explore how was the Church ordered for its task and ministry? From the analogies in Scripture, particularly 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we see that the Church is like a human body. *1Co 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.* Within a body there are different functions. *1Co 12:15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?* This shows us that there is considerable diversity in a body and that it is not a clone of identical parts. This diversity is seen in society where people have different careers and different abilities.

We have commonalities in the Church (we are saved by Christ, we are baptised etc) but we are also unique and have different gifts. None can be discounted as irrelevant. *1Co 12:22 The opposite is true. The parts of the body that we think are weaker are the ones we really need.* GW. The danger that we face is that we create a body that is out of balance. Often it is a body with a few functioning parts with the congregation acting as a tumour, that only functions to draw strength from the working part.

Well you may say, “I don’t have a gift, I do not know that God has given me one”. I ask, do you desire a gift? *1Co 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts*: That is down to you. I think that each and every Christian should strive for excellence in the Church and be the best and most useful that they can. I have often thought that if Christians behaved in the workplace as they do in Churches, they would be out of a job. However, you may say to me, look, Paul says *1Co 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way*. Surely that’s an alternative to gifts? Love is an alternative.

Let’s look at that. Paul has just laboured on the need for gifts and the desire for them. He is not sweeping that away. Indeed, when you get into chapter 14, he says again, *1Co 14:1 Follow after love; yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy*. ASV. What I think Paul is saying in is this *1Co 12:31 But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And moreover a most excellent way show I unto you*. ASV. The words “more excellent” is literally “hyperbole” (ὑπερβολήν), something beyond. He is saying, you need gifts but beyond that you need a good dose of love to make them effective. Read Ch 13.

In the early 1970’s there was a lot of interest in “tongues”, in fact it became in some eyes the mark of conversion, it became known as “initial evidence”. If you didn’t speak in tongues your conversion was questionable. My recall of this is, that it was divisive and contrary to the purpose of the gifts (edification). It was also one of the easiest to fake and many who claimed it didn’t continue in the faith. Gifts were badges of rank not marks of service. That said, many gifts can be faked, *2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them*.

What I see now as the most important thing regarding gifts is that they are desired for the reason of building up one another in love. Using the things that the Spirit has bestowed to help each other through life, not as sticks to beat each other, or steps to look down on each other. If you are seeking a gift, seek it for the right reasons and with that enduring love that will become your eternal legacy. It will not be said of you that you “did gifts” but “didn’t do love”.

We have added to our prayer lists that God will raise up gifted persons. I ask for polymaths, that can cover the range of issues and disciplines that faith can be applied to. Men like those of Issachar in David’s day. *1Ch 12:32 From the family of Issachar there were 200 wise leaders. These men understood the right thing for Israel to do at the right time*. 200 in one family? Who prayed for that?

Church builders?

Part 7. *Eph 4:11 He also gave apostles, prophets, missionaries, as well as pastors and teachers as gifts to his Church. Their purpose is to prepare God's people, to serve, and to build up the body of Christ.*

We look today at Church builders. The way that we conduct our worship may also work against the development and use of gifts. We may have such a rigid leadership that it acts as a conductor in an orchestra and arranges each meeting. These leaders may even choose the instruments. What is of

note, however, is that the NT does not prescribe any form of service. There should be the opportunity to exercise gifts *1Co 14:39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.* That does not mean that anything goes. The watchword is “decency” or honesty and “order” *1Co 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.*

I do not see that the NT ministry revolves around the Teacher, Song leader or any one person. In a sense, the Quaker approach is quite Biblical. They emphasise direct experience of God rather than ritual and ceremony. It is a time when Friends become inwardly still and clear aside the activities of mind and body to create an opportunity to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is not a time for "thinking," for deliberate, intellectual exercise. It is a time for spiritual receptivity. Perhaps what is also important is to prepare for worship by taking time to think about why we come together and how we can encourage one another.

So why you ask do we have people called Bishops and Elders? Aren't these worship leaders? Bishops are overseers. *1Pe 5:1 The elders (presbyters) which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder sun-presbyter), and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight (episkopos=bishop) thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Tit 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and **ordain elders** (presbyters) in every city (see Acts 14:23 Church), as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. **For a bishop** (episkopos) must be blameless...*

Bishops and elders are the same. They watch over the flock as a shepherd caring for his sheep. *Act 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (episkopos), to feed (shepherd) the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.* These people are mature and proven in their family which is the training ground for service. There is no ministry for unproven single men as in the Catholic Church. There is no accreditation from a pastors college that makes them fit for purpose. They are not ministers, deans, rectors, fathers, monsigneurs, arch-bishops, Popes, Metropolitans or reverends (see letter below). Bishops and elders are servants not rulers and do not have to be full time or employed by the Church.

Among the Church builders are those that Christ has specifically gifted and are found in our text today. They are perhaps best described as ground breakers or founders. Their purpose is to ground believers and make them fit to minister. It is one of those things that I regret, that in the period I was saved, there were few gifted people in the Churches we had access to. I think what we might be if we had been firmly grounded in the faith sooner? There was no discipleship.

It was however the oil crisis of 1973 that precipitated our search for what the Church should be, when a few of us came together to see what Christ expected of our worship and service. We could not travel distances to other Churches so we met where we were in our houses. Perhaps we have lived in an age where we got what we deserved, the harvest of religious decline. If that is to be halted, then we need to reconstruct the way of the New Testament. Let us start by praying for Christians to desire that return.

Sacraments or ordinances

Part 8. 1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

You have probably heard of the term sacrament. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer defines a sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." I think that this is where Christianity gets confusing for many people because they just cannot see these teachings in their Bible. They are right because they are inventions of men in so far as they are explained by men. They are a little bit of religious magic that the inner circle of religious leadership have power to manipulate.

The Latin word sacramentum means "a sign of the sacred." In Catholicism the seven sacraments are ceremonies that supposedly point to what is sacred, significant and important for Christians. They **are special occasions for experiencing God's saving presence**. That's what theologians mean when they say that sacraments are at the same time signs and instruments of God's grace. Baptism (Christening), Confirmation (Chrismation), Holy Eucharist, Penance (Confession), Anointing of the Sick (known Extreme Unction), Holy Orders (ordination), and Matrimony (Marriage).

Let's look at that in more detail in the example of the Eucharist, communion or Lord's Table as it is variously known. Instituted by Christ at the Passover *Luk 22:15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer* (read section). It was a solemn occasion but a simple one. Catholics believe the Priest invokes the Holy Spirit during the Mass but the consecration becomes effective through the Priest, who acts in the person of Christ. The gifts change completely into Christ's body and blood and this change is termed 'Transubstantiation' i.e. the outward appearance remains the same, but the substance changes. Bread becomes God. Church magic! Only the "specialists" can do this magic trick.

Among those partaking the first Lord's table was Judas Iscariot who later hanged himself and clearly did not experience "God's saving presence". Likewise *1Co 11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*. It runs both ways and it can bless or curse. So again, "God's saving presence" is not guaranteed. One might say it can be an occasion of God's judgement.

What makes any act sacred is that it is done in obedience to God's word. *1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams*. Protestant Churches have tended to use the term ordinance rather than sacrament, which stresses "what the Christians do", in other words Christian duties.

Christening is another example of Church magic as so called "special occasions for experiencing God's saving presence". Well as we all know, Adolph Hitler was christened into the Catholic Church as was Joseph Stalin who entered a Jesuit seminary! So much for saving grace.

Jesus did not institute sacraments. He DID introduce discipleship and personal accountability. There are no substitutes or proxies for this. Wearing a crucifix doesn't ward off evil. Christening does not regenerate a soul. Eating bread and wine does not sanctify a sinner. Ordinances or rituals have meaning only within the context of individual biblical faith. The idea that they can work apart from personal faith is a lie. The dangers of ritual are that they become a form of worship which in turn becomes the substitute for personal faith. How on earth can someone say the last rites over a dying unbeliever and think that a godless life can be put aside by another technician of religion a self appointed magician. This delusional teaching has consigned millions to hell.

Tradition

Part 9. Col 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

The Greek word for tradition παράδοσις/paradosis means "giving beside", a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, i.e. tradition by instruction, narrative, precept, etc. objectively, that which is delivered, the substance of a teaching. The precepts of Moses were expanded beyond the written law and as Jews thought, were to be obeyed with equal reverence. We shall explore the value of "tradition" and examine it in the light of the Bible.

Jesus came into conflict with the Jewish traditions which did not have the weight or authority of scripture. *Mat 15:2 Why do thy transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? Mar 7:7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.* Jesus saw tradition overriding the word of God and displacing the word of God.

Volumes have been written by Rabbis since the days of Jesus and cover all manner of subjects in an attempt to clarify scripture. The Mishnah is just such a volume revered by Jews. Paul was steeped in tradition *Gal 1:14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.* However, it is when these teachings lead us away from scripture, rather than in to scripture, the problem occurs. The Roman Catholic Church has elevated pronouncements given by the Pope infallible and equal to scripture. And even we have accumulated our own traditions such as Christmas, Church buildings, preaching to unbelievers in Church gospel services, grape juice instead of wine, structure and order of worship, Tithing, Titles of office.

Some see no problem with these matters and accommodate them but in doing so we have to make a distinction between what is handed over by men and what is handed over by God. We must be on guard as to those things that will spoil (seduce or lead away) through empty and deceitful human thinking (Col 2 v 8). The things handed over by God, the traditions taught by the Apostles are part of our faith. *2Th 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. 1Co 11:2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances (traditions), as I delivered them to you.*

Young Christians are easily deceived because they are not well grounded in the faith. They are open to all manner of false belief. *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath* (READ). We are not bound by anything that is not found in scripture and we have enough duty to do with what is written without inventing religious activities.

Finally, let us not dismiss the traditions of man as mere freedom of conscience. Worshipping idols, christening infants, taking rank and titles that are not given by God, are not issues of conscience, they are issues of obedience. We give an answer to God for this. It is also important that people who will not follow the truth are isolated *2Th 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us*. Why? These people carry the plague of error with them and will infect other people. They will like bad companions contaminate your faith.

Duration and legacy of a congregation

Part 10. *Act:13:36* For David indeed, having in his own generation ministered to the will of God, fell asleep, and was added to his fathers and saw corruption.

David lived, died and rotted in his grave, that is what the verse says. It is set in contrast to the next verse *Act 13:37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption*, showing Jesus as the eternal and incorruptible Holy one. The person that connects us all is Jesus. As for you and me, *1Pe 1:24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away*. As the hymn says, “We blossom and flourish, as leaves on the tree; And wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee”.

My question then is, “What legacy if any should we the Church today leave to the next generation, the Church tomorrow?” Well firstly you do not leave a legacy if you haven’t made an investment. If you haven’t brought your children up in the faith they have no legacy. *2Co 12:14 for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved*. Paul wasn’t popular with all of his spiritual children but he loved them by keeping on at them while he was alive with them. All he left them in death were a few letters which clearly, some treasured. He never left them a building or a denomination. Why is it we leave people things when we are dead rather than when we are alive?

I used to think that it was a parental duty to drag children into Church meetings each week even if they didn’t want to go. I thought that I may be neglecting my duty doing this but often it just fosters little hypocrites. I would not do that now. We are never encouraged to force unbelievers to go to meetings. However since we meet in homes it is not such a problem. What I would do is make sure that my house echoed to the sounds of Christ and His word such that they could not escape the demands on them not just for 1 hour on Sunday.

When you and I die, we leave them nothing, if they did not make a personal commitment to Christ. Leaving them a meeting each week in a building you left behind is not substitute for personal faith. Following a denomination is not Christianity. It is down to each person to make his own relationship with Christ. If you have that relationship by proxy, through someone else, a minister, another person's strong faith, you have nothing. You might as well give up. You are following institutional Christianity. That is a pseudo Church, a false "Church" which operates as an organisation independent of its members. We must come back to see a Church is people not buildings and that is why leaving buildings is pointless and faithless. The word congregation is probably more appropriate than Church.

Each generation of Christians must make their own way and dig for their own water in their own wells. *Gen 26:18 And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.* If you are not prepared to do it for yourself, you will become a parasite and have nothing to offer the Church.

If there is a provision for the next generation it is made in the now. *2Ti 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.* All we can do is minister to our generation. Christ never demanded that we should minister beyond our lives. *2Ti 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:*

It is the Lord who spans the generations and it is He who will build His Church. We have to be careful that what we do in our lives does not hinder that building. Many of the activities of religious people in setting up their reforms, their denominations, their buildings, their missions, their creeds have served to hinder the spontaneous generation of Christ's Church in the next generation. They are tied to a past that they did not make. As such these works of man serve to freeze and paralyze the Spirit *1Th 5:19 Quench not the Spirit.*

The legacy for the next Generation must be Christ alone and none of me.

How should we gather? 1

Part 11. *Act 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.*

We have fallen a long way since those days in the first century when people were saved every day. Just how far, we shall explore. Firstly, I want to set the scene for that time. When many of us read our Bibles, we feed back into it the images of our own day and the experiences of our own day. By this I mean that we look at the New Testament Churches, for example one in Corinth and visualise them arranged and behaving exactly like congregations in our own day.

You may see them in your mind's eye as sitting in rows on pews or chairs, in a little gospel hall or ancient cathedral, with men up at the front leading worship and preaching from a raised platform.

There will be an area where the choir sits and a place for the musicians. At some stage in this meeting a person passes a collection plate around and after that, everyone shares the Lord's Table which is presided over by a Church leader. This however is not how it was, it is what we have developed over the centuries as religion.

After the resurrection the disciples met together in an upper room *Act 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.* They didn't rush out to spread the gospel, they waited for Christ's promise. Then, on the day of Pentecost, a miracle happened and the Holy Spirit fell upon them (Acts 2).

There is a Jewish tradition that Pentecost commemorates God giving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai fifty days after the Exodus. The Talmud supposedly derives this from a calculation based on Biblical Texts. However the Bible shows that Pentecost was a harvest festival. *Lev 23:15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.* (see also Deut 16 v 9). The day of Pentecost marked the offering of the first fruits of the Harvest.

This small band of believers became the first fruits of the harvest and now were invested with Divine power. *Luk 24:49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.* The promise was fulfilled. This penniless band of disciples were not endowed with a bank account *Act 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.* **They were not given any institutional support.** They had no headquarters building for their work, no evangelistic association, no missionary society, no training colleges, no purpose built meeting houses, no house of God or for God, in short absolutely nothing but what they stood up in And the Power of the Creator of the Universe was flowing in their lives.

You can see the difference between religion today and then. We have institutionalised it to fill all of the gaps with the things that they did not have and in the process lost the very thing which made them successful. The Spirit of God. You see, success does not require an institution it requires obedience so that Christ can build HIS Church (that is the people) in HIS way. An old saint observed that we have come a long way from the time Peter said *Act 3:6 ... Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.* Today we have plenty of money but we are impotent to raise up a single soul.

At this point let us go forward a few years and imagine the Gospel moving out from Jerusalem to the edges of the Roman Empire. Imagine that you live in a town, perhaps on a trade route, and you have never heard of this Jesus of Nazareth. One day while you are out shopping in the market, you hear one of these evangelists talking about Jesus. Your heart is moved to embrace the forgiveness of sin and you press forward to talk with the evangelist. "What must I do to be saved?" Well, probably the same thing would have been said as that to the jailor from Philippi *Act 16:30 And brought them out,*

and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

You would have heard the “Word of the Lord”, sufficient to explain what was happening and why. Then you would have been baptised. No delays, no waiting for opportunities to do it in comfort, no time to arrange a special service as some Churches do. This is what they do today. According to one Church: “Baptism services are the time to come and hear the personal story of the person being baptised, and then to witness them being baptised in a pool or water. No! Baptism is the immediate response to forgiveness and is a testimony **to God** and not men *1Pe 3:21 (not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; It is the natural response of the soul to God’s call.*

Failure to have responded to baptism would have been a rejection of the Gospel. Baptism was not an option in those times and it is not today. *Mar 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* People want forgiveness but not step one, obedience.

Now imagine what might happen. You are now part of a group of people, possibly some you knew in your town, some you never spoke to before and some you may not have liked but here you all are, standing together as new converts. What next? There are no Bibles being handed out (The Bible doesn’t exist completely yet and it is still being written by hand and will not be in print for another 1400 years). There is no meeting place erected for gathering and no instructions to build one. The early Christians did not have time or resources to put into specialist structures, that we today mistakenly call Churches. There you are, new believers huddled together, forming a new community. What next?

They just got on with their lives where they lived but now with Christ in them working through them as a body of believers (Acts 2 v 46) meeting and sharing in their faith. They were not reduced to a Sunday worship brigade. There were six other days in the week where they worshipped their Lord. In fact there is no prescribed worship day. It was “daily with one accord”. They did not have specialist leaders, reverends and pastors presiding over them. They were all gifted and shared their gifts. *1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

Years ago, I was being pressured to “join a Church” and become a member of a denomination. Denomination as you know is a word which means a division (a denominator is a divisor). One of the verses often quoted to get people together today is this one. *Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the **assembling of ourselves together**, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* The verse is in the context of provoking each other to love and good works. It is about the interaction of Christians with each other. Worship is not formulated in the early Church. It is not about meeting on a particular day, in fact that is never

specified but **it is about the company that you keep**, the day and where, being a matter of mutual convenience. It is not about going to Church it is about being a Church.

In these modern Churches it does not matter too much what you do for the rest of the week. What company you kept, what you occupied yourself with, where you went, who your friends were. It was all about being part of a Sunday group. You could disassemble from your Sunday service and what you did was no longer part of their concern as long as you assembled on Sunday. You were a paid up Baptist, Anglican or whatever. However, that is not what the verse is about. The verse is about the importance of keeping the company of believers. It is about fellowship to encourage us to share our walk in the faith, to be a society of believers.

For many in the Churches today, salvation and the forgiveness of sin marks the goal of attainment. You are saved and you can get on with your life. Little consideration is given to the way you conduct that life. Yet when the believers in the NT entered the faith they also exchanged their life style. They exchanged the company they kept for the company of believers, knowing that *Jas 4:4 ... the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* The early Christians were encouraged to break the unequal yoke, *2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?* In its place was the yoking together of the faithful. If they met with unbelievers it was to promote Christ not socialise.

These Christians met together for prayer, worship, encouragement, meals or wherever the Spirit led them. Any time any place. Numbers did not count, *Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* Christ is happy to meet with a few if that is all there is. That same Spirit, Christ Himself, ministered **through** them *Rom 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.* Paul wrote that letter to the Romans about 24 years after the Crucifixion. There were no Bible colleges, no commentaries or Bibles, no trained clergy, no special buildings to meet in, yet they enjoyed a vibrant and gifted worship as Christ's Spirit moved amongst them. They ministered to each other. Not turning their backs on each other in pews or chairs.

It is an obvious reflection on our Christianity today that we live lives so embedded in this world, that we have little to share of the life to come and the experience of it in our daily lives. How is it possible to be a Christian and go from one week to the next without an experience of him in our life that is worth sharing? If we lack gifts it is our own fault for not asking. We lack gifts because we do not earnestly seek them, *1Co 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts.* Why do we not earnestly seek them? It is because we have no desire to build stronger Christians or build each other up. The status quo is good enough for us. We would rather prefer to let others do it and in many cases are quite happy to pay others to do it. We prefer institutionalised religion rather than Christian fellowship.

What we pass off today as Christianity bears little resemblance to that which was established in the first century. I wonder how those early Christians would react to our Sunday services, regimented in pews, choreographed by specialists, striving to maintain the outward fabric buildings, compromised as to our beliefs, unwilling to speak out against sin and unable to share our gifts having placed them

all in the hands of one man...the Reverend! Then departing, not to meet until another seven days have passed. How do you think they would view that?

Some might say that worship has developed and evolved over time and that we are no longer living in a primitive world of undeveloped first century Christianity. Well, I do not believe in biological evolution and I do not believe in religious evolution. Religion is purest at its origin and has always had a tendency to degenerate. You can see this in the Older Testament *Zec 1:3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.* Israel went into captivity because it neglected to serve the Lord. Religious entropy is a fact of life unless the Spirit of God empowers it and sustains it.

Jesus questioned whether there would be any faith on earth when He returned. *Luk 18:8..... Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* Let us not disappoint Him and let us return to our roots and put away the modern compromise that is passed off as Christianity.

How should we gather? 2

Part 12. Act 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.

George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement said, "the Lord showed me clearly, that he did not dwell in these temples which men had commanded and built, but in people's hearts; and God had only ever commanded one temple to be built; so "Church buildings" were an abomination to the Lord. Fox refused to apply the word "Church" to a building, using instead the name "steeple-house," a usage maintained by many Quakers today. Fox often met with interested masses of people in fields and orchards or even barns; early Quakers also met together to wait on the Lord in plain "meeting houses."

The earliest building certainly devoted to Christian use is at Dura Europos on the Euphrates River in eastern Roman Syria. It was a house that came into Christian possession and was remodelled in the 240's. Two rooms were combined to form the assembly room, and another room became a baptistery—the only room decorated with pictures. Dura was destroyed by the Sassanian Persians in the year 256 AD, so the house's use as a Church was short-lived. The great era of Church buildings began with Constantine's patronage of the Church in the fourth century. He commissioned basilicas to signal his support of the new religion and to advertise his reign.

Armenia became the first country to adopt Christianity as its state religion, through the ministry of Gregory the Illuminator or Gregory the Enlightener, as he was known. The number sacred monuments (Churches, monasteries, chapels, shrines and Khachkars, (or stone crosses) is huge. There are more than 5,000 Churches, monasteries and chapels in Armenia, and over 20,000 Khachkars (cross stone) in the small territory of the Republic alone! At the very first, simple crosses were erected on the sites where a pagan temple was located and that was enough.; As the crusade to convert the pagan population gained momentum, the fervour with which Gregory and his army

destroyed the pagan temples increased, and new "temples" or Churches were built on the same foundations of the pagan ones, which dictated their size and first designs.

Church buildings were a statement of power over paganism. Even in the UK, many old pagan sites were the places over which religious buildings were established. A local example is St Mary's Eversley, where a Sarsen stone lies under the floor. In some sense these old buildings are the gravesite for the paganism they hoped to supplant. Now in turn, they are becoming little different in their beliefs that now embrace the new age humanism.

Here is something to take away from this meeting. When you pass a Church building, ask yourself what it really signifies? God does not live in buildings. *Act 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;* These buildings are not the house of God. They are monuments of division (denominations) because on one you see "Baptist" on another you see "Methodist" on another "Anglican". This has nothing to do with Christ because he did not sanction any of them.

When you see these sometimes ornate structures, you are looking at monuments to the failure of the early Church. You are looking at forms of worship that substitute for the original body ministry of Christ. This is perhaps why Oliver Cromwell became an iconoclast in order to simplify and remove the artificial distractions to worship. It is no wonder that congregations are dying in droves and full of people who are spiritually dead.

Remembrance

Part 13. Luk 22:19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Today the world remembers the Armistice Day which marks the end of the Great War. Why should we have a remembrance day? It is because it is in our nature to forget. "Recessional" is a poem by Rudyard Kipling, which he composed on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. "God of our fathers, known of old—Lord of our far-flung battle line—Beneath whose awful hand we hold, Dominion over palm and pine—Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, **Lest we forget—lest we forget!**" That phrase is now used in connection with Remembrance Day.

I read a touching story in the press this week about the death of a wife. Lord Saatchi married Josephine Hart in 1984 but the Irish-born writer and poet, died from ovarian cancer in June last year. Saatchi told the Sunday Times: 'I've never experienced grief before; this is an incomparable nightmare.' At meal times the Tory peer behaves as if she were still there. He said: 'I have thought that this is close to madness.' He rejected the idea that those suffering from bereavement need to move on. He added: 'In my view, to move on is a monstrous act of betrayal and to come to terms with – I think I'd call that an act of selfishness.' I think that is our attitude with Jesus

Jesus asked us not to forget Him. *1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.* Lest we forget, we are encouraged to remember Christ death. It is a foundation of our faith, yet ask yourself, what do you actually remember? Let us remind ourselves how little we have to know to get into that relationship with Jesus. We didn't need to pass a Bible knowledge test, attend a special induction course or go through training. In the early Church, the Spirit of God worked on a 2 minute speech to induce a crisis of conscience in the hearers.

Act 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? (Read Acts 2 v 14ff). This living testimony of the Apostle's own experience of Jesus was confirmed by the Holy Spirit. That brethren is the sum and substance of conversion.

When we celebrate the Lord's Table, we are remembering the life and death of Jesus and how we have become a partaker in the death. It is a reminder of who we now are. It is the trooping of the colour we follow. It is the showing forth of the death of Christ *1Co 11:26 ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.* It is holding the fortification until the King of Armies returns. It is a constant reminder for us to be ready for Christ, *Mat 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*

We are not told how to remember, perhaps because that is always personal. Whether our mental images are like those from the "Passion of Christ" or the good shepherd, the woman touching the hem of His garment for healing or the raising of Lazarus, we all come to the same place, the Cenotaph, the empty tomb. It is a Cenotaph because the grave could not hold Him. Although we remember a death scene it is not a dead saviour we mourn. We show forth His death because that is the road to life. Without that death we had no life and if we do not eat of His body and drink his blood we are lifeless, *Joh 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*

Christ Himself left us with this very personal request, from God Himself, to erect this memorial for Him often. Lest we forget.

The Scriptures 1

Part 14. Heb 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us **by them that heard him;**

Stating the issues. We have noted that the early Church did not have any of the writings that we call "The New Testament" for many decades after the resurrection of Jesus and that these writings did not become widely circulated for at least a century and even more importantly, many were not even named (e.g. the gospel of Mathew) for two centuries. By naming the first four gospels after Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we show that we trust a late second century tradition. Irenaeus is the earliest writer to identify the authors of the four Gospels. What did the early Church then regard as "scripture"? I want to look at this controversial issue, especially as many Christians think that our

leather bound copies of the King James version available from all good Bible Bookshops were delivered from heaven itself, written by the finger of God.

I want to raise some questions to get us thinking. *2Ti 3:16 All scripture (γραφή) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:* The question we must ask is what, in the mind of the writer constituted the scripture? If the letter to Timothy is not the last inspired (God breathed) document of the NT what does that say of the later books? Remember the order of books in the NT is not the order in which they were written. Is the idea of what is “inspired”, something men have imposed on the ancient writings?

How did people use the sacred writings? When ordinary citizens under the first covenant came together the scripture or the law as it was, was read to them. *Deu 31:11 When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing.* Presumably it was read by the keepers of the law, the Priests and Levites. The king had to write and read his own copy. *Deu 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: Deu 17:19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:*

From creation to Moses, there are no records of written texts although there was a clear understanding of law, sacrifice and offerings (Abel, Noah) which were in place before the law was codified. There must have been a strong oral tradition. Scripture in a written form was clearly not critical to the conduct of religion. This raises the question as to what is the role of the writings that we call scripture.

We put scripture or the books of our Bible in a different category to other writings. We treat it differently to say, “daily notes”, “Every day with Jesus” or “Daily Light”? Do we get extra points for reading our favourite passages in our Bible? I say “read” rather than “study” because few people “study” the Bible. Many Protestant daily Bible rituals differ little from the Catholic and their rosary bead rituals.

We are in danger of becoming Pharisees who barricade themselves behind Bible verses without experiencing the life of Christ. *Joh 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* We might consider that prayer is a far more important part of our spiritual life than Bible reading. Prayer takes us directly to the presence of our Creator. Prayer is talking to the Creator through Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine what sort of relationship it would be with a person, if all we picked up about them was what we read in a newspaper? We had no direct verbal contact with them, only what we read about them. Is that really a relationship? Is this what Jesus meant when He said “**ye will not come to ME, that ye might have life**”. Can you further imagine what sort of relationship it would be where we scanned the newspapers in the hope that we could find a personal message in the text from the individual? We limited our communication from God to what we think He is saying to us in texts? Never any direct contact.

Did Jesus ask us to become theologians? *Act 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.* This is not an exhortation to read the Bible everyday. The Bereans were Jews who only had the OT. The Bereans were verifying that the words of Paul agreed with the OT. That they weren't being scammed by a religious charlatan.

Now I am not by any means suggesting that it is wrong to read the Bible or that we should neglect to read it every day. What I am questioning is our use of it in our religious lives. The scriptures are the condiments for the daily meal with God.

What does this term "scripture" embrace and what does "inspired" scriptures mean and how do we know? What about the other writings, the Apocryphal writings and the Hagiographa. Why have we separated these from our 66 books of the KJV? Why in the epistle of Jude is a book quoted that we do not have in our inspired writings? *Jud 1:14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,* See book of Enoch 1:9 And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of [His] holy ones, To execute judgement upon all, and to destroy [all] the ungodly: And to convict all flesh Of all the works [of their ungodliness] which they have ungodly committed, And of all the hard things which ungodly sinners [have spoken] against Him.

The Book of Enoch existed centuries before the birth of Christ and yet is considered by many to be more Christian in its theology than Jewish. It was considered scripture by many early Christians. The earliest literature of the so-called "Church Fathers" is filled with references to this mysterious book. The early second century "Epistle of Barnabus" makes much use of the Book of Enoch. Second and Third Century "Church Fathers" like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origin and Clement of Alexandria all make use of the Book of Enoch. Tertullian (160-230 AD) even called the Book of Enoch "Holy Scripture". The Ethiopic Church even added the Book of Enoch to its official canon. It was widely known and read the first three centuries after Christ. This and many other books became discredited after the Council of Laodicea. And being under ban of the authorities, afterwards it gradually passed out of circulation.

Paul refers to the non-canonical book Jannes and Jambres (*2Ti 3:8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.*) when naming the magicians of Pharaoh's court in Moses' time. Hebrews, in referring to those who were "sawn in two," alludes to and depends upon a book called the Martyrdom of Isaiah (*Heb 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; cf Ch5 Martyrdom of Isaiah [Chapter 5] 1b, 2 And he sawed him asunder with a wood-saw. And when Isaiah was being sawn in sunder Balchira stood up, accusing him, and all the false prophets stood up, laughing and rejoicing because of Isaiah.*)

In addition to his use of the Book of Enoch, Jude cites the Assumption of Moses when he theologizes on the archangel Michael's dispute with the devil over the body of Moses (*Jud 1:9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring*

against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.). The OT also makes references to other works. *Jos 10:13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher (THE UPRIGHT)? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.* Jasher 88:63 And when they were smiting, the day was declining toward evening, and Joshua said in the sight of all the people, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon, until the nation shall have revenged itself upon its enemies. Also Jasher is mentioned in Samuel. *2Sa 1:18 and he ordered his men to teach the song to everyone in Judah. He called it "The Song of the Bow," and it can be found in The Book of Jashar.*

The point that I am making is this, that the Church in other ages had a much wider concept of scripture than we do today. In fact one of the best kept secrets of the modern Protestant Church that sanctifies the King James Version, is that the Bible used by them is not the original King James Bible. That translation, completed in 1611, and the Bibles published for the use of the clergy and the Church members until late in the 19th Century, contained 80 books. The **additional 14 books were the Apocrypha**, yet the concept of the Protestant Church about the Apocrypha is virtually non-existent, with the general understanding that only the Catholic Church uses it.

It must also be noted that that bastion of state religion, the C of E endorsed the Apocrypha in its articles of religion. **VI. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.** Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.... And the other Books (as Hierome saith) **the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners;** but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine; such are these following: The Third Book of Esdras, The rest of the Book of Esther, The Fourth Book of Esdras, The Book of Wisdom, etc.

So why was Jerome (c 350 AD) such an authority? He was educated but not in step with many others of his age. He made a Latin translation of the Bible. Prior to Jerome's Vulgate, all Latin translations of the Old Testament were based on the Septuagint (Greek) and **not** the Hebrew. Jerome's decision to use a Hebrew text instead of the previous translated Septuagint went against the advice of most other Christians, including Augustine, who thought the Septuagint inspired. Modern scholarship, however, has cast doubts on the actual quality of Jerome's Hebrew knowledge.

George Abbot, one of the New Testament workers on the AV, after he became Archbishop of Canterbury (the only one to have accidentally killed a man) issued an ordinance that anyone who published the English Bible **without the Apocrypha** should be imprisoned for a year. When was the Apocrypha removed from the KJV? It was in 1885 by Archbishop Benson who is an interesting character for many reasons. Edward White Benson was born in Highgate, Birmingham, the son of a Birmingham chemical manufacturer. He was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated BA (8th classic) in 1852.

Benson began his career as a schoolmaster at Rugby School in 1852, and was ordained deacon in 1852 and priest in 1857. In 1859 Benson was chosen by Prince Albert as the first Master (headmaster) of Wellington College, Berkshire, which had been built as the nation's memorial to the Duke of Wellington. Benson was largely responsible for establishing Wellington as a public school, closely modelled on Rugby School, rather than the military academy originally planned. In 1883 he was appointed arch-bishop of Canterbury and it was his decision to remove the Apocrypha. This date coincides with the arrival of the Revised Version of the Bible and perhaps that is the reason for the loss. Higher Criticism was also eroding the authority of scripture.

We have raised a number of issues today and DV will look further at them next time. What is becoming clear is that the concept of sacred writings in other centuries is different from ours in the 20th Century.

The Scriptures 2

Part 15. Luk 4:21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

We have been examining the early Church attitudes to sacred writings and what for them constituted “scripture”. They clearly had a much broader view than us. We also asked the question what writings are “expired” by God (2 Tim 3 v 16 “God breathed”) and what are not and whether a book that does not have a Divine stamp is unusable or untruthful.

This time I want to go back and examine the view of Jesus towards scripture and what to Him constituted the Word of God. To do this we must accept, that the Gospels as we have received them, are reasonably accurate copies of the original autographs and that they are truthful records of the events. There is no evidence from any sources that this is not so. Proceeding from this assumption, we see that Jesus quoted from 24 different Old Testament books.

The New Testament (as we have it today) as a whole, quotes from 34 books of the Old Testament. In doing so it quotes 247 separate sections of OT scriptures. The 5 books that are not quoted in the New Testament are Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. It may not be significant that these books were never quoted in the New Testament, because they were part of “collections” of Old Testament books. Since other books within the same collection were quoted, it might suggest that these can also be included in the canon.

Christ’s primary view of the Older Testament, was that it revealed Him. *Luk 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the **law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning ME.*** This suggests a way in which we should use these ancient writings since they are a revelation of Jesus. This revelation covers the three major divisions of the Hebrew writings, namely, the Law, The Prophets and the Writings (known as the TANAC= Torah **Nabim** and **Chetuvim**). In a general sense Christ is affirming His acceptance of the OT writings.

These OT books prophesied the things of Christ, for example, *Mat 26:31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for **it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the***

sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. (Zec 13:7). “It is written” was a phrase much used by Jesus to settle a dispute (26 uses in gospels). It was the last word on a matter and therefore the source was authoritative.

Not all references to the OT are straightforward, for example, *Joh 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* No one contradicted this quotation and the result was to confirm Jesus as the Christ and the Prophet. However, the scripture being referred to is not found anywhere word for word, but rather Christ seems to be referring to many different places where mention is made of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; see (Joel 2:28-29; Isa 44:3) and especially (Isa 55:1-13). *Isa 41:17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.*

This raises the point that “scriptures” exist in the broader concept spread over multiple verses. Multiple texts may be required to give a meaning rather than a single text. If that is so, it certainly makes the way we use scripture different to Jesus. Another example may be in *Act 20:35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, **how he said**, It is more blessed to give than to receive.* This saying of Jesus is not in any of the Gospels but is a generalisation that can be based on other scriptures.

So far then we have established a basis for acceptance of the OT writings and that their primary use was to validate the ministry of Christ and for establishing the Kingdom of God.

The Scriptures 3

Part 16. Joh 5:46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe **my words**?

In his lifetime, it is reckoned that the great evangelist George Whitfield preached at least 18,000 times to perhaps 10 million hearers. In the mid-1700’s the logistics of this achievement are formidable. Yet Whitfield did not preach 18,000 individually crafted sermons on different subjects. He would not have had the time to prepare and deliver this amount. He had some key themes and it is suggested that the new birth featured in 30% of his messages. After all, the crowds may have changed as he travelled but the key messages were the same.

I believe that Jesus would have had some key ministries for the people, for example the ministry of the blessings (beatitudes). He is recorded as preaching this in two different places. *Luk 6:17 And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, Mat 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain.* I think that it is this repetition of ministry that makes it memorable to the disciples and consequently an accurate record. It is strange that after decades, I can still recall, verbatim, the trivial lyrics of old pop songs, because we played them endlessly. Repetition burns into memory.

So here is another reason to believe the Gospels because they were burned into the minds of the disciples.

It is also clear that the writers of the Gospel had no difficulty believing what Jesus believed and that they made no attempt to airbrush out any supposed historical inaccuracies. Jesus believed the scriptures to be historically true. This may seem like an unnecessary point, yet nonetheless, today, many want to believe in Jesus but reject certain O.T. stories such as the flood and Jonah and the whale. The OT was not to Him a legend or a myth.

- He spoke of the creation. *Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,*
- He referred to the flood in Noah's day. *Mat 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,*
- He spoke of the widow who fed Elijah and Naaman the Leper. *Luke 4:25-27*
- He spoke of the repentance of Nineveh. *Mat 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*
- He spoke of Daniel the prophet. *Mat 24:15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel...*

If you believe in Jesus as Lord, you are drawing on the witness of the Gospels for that information. If that information is to be trusted, it includes a belief in the Creation, the Flood and miracles. It is thoroughly dishonest to pick out the bits you can accept and reject the rest. If you accept the story of Jesus, it is based upon the Gospels. In those Gospels, the Jesus of the Gospels, believed in creation. By what authority or process can a person reject Christ's belief and still claim to be a follower of the Christ? It is madness. Jesus in part draws His authority from the fact that the OT is to be believed. It is truth. Moses wrote about Jesus. The record of Jesus' miracles confirm these truths, especially His power over the Creation and death.

The early Church would have absorbed these truths. To the Jewish converts it was old knowledge fulfilled. To the gentile Christians it was a re-writing of their fundamental beliefs and the overthrow of ancient mythologies. That said, we have already seen that the early Church often synthesised its new beliefs with ancient myths. This still continues with Churches today assimilating evolution, socialism, homosexuality and women's rights. Every step in these directions is a step away from the original message and practice of Christianity. *Joh 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.* Maintaining that original purity of truth preserves the Church.

The Scriptures 4

Part 17. *Joh 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

We have suggested that although the early Church lacked writings, it had the living knowledge of the gospels, because the Apostles gave them first hand accounts. Our text is a statement that the Spirit of God will reinforce His teachings. If we take in the words of God, God will activate them in due

season. If you do not take in those words, what can be brought to your remembrance? God has little to work with.

I do not believe that man has an innate knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil. The idea of a conscience that infallibly guides us is untrue. *Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Tit 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.* Conscience can be evil and defiled. No man is infallible when it comes to right and wrong.

The Lord will cause His teachings to come to light in our lives. *Act 11:16 Then **remembered** I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.* Divine guidance is promised but it is conditional upon our first having imbibed the word. *1Pe 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.* When the Bible makes statements such as: *1Jn 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. Joh 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.* These are not promises of knowledge without effort.

Another strand of the early Churches capability was that it had spiritual gifts. They actively sought them and it is an apostolic command that we should seek them. *1Co 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts.* Christians who do not actively seek gifts are not concerned with the purpose of edifying other Christians. This is the major difference between what we have today in the institutionalised Church that froze the reformation in the 1500's and the New Testament Church. They had the mutual exercise of gifts. *1Co 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; (READ).*

Can we revive that original form of worship? I believe that we can because Jesus is the same today as He was then. We have changed not Jesus. In each generation we have micturated into that original stream of faith and each generation has added its own pollution of practices such that it bears little resemblance to its original. If you ask me what the legacy of each generation of Christians should be, I would say, nothing at all. Leave it all as you found it at the beginning, untouched by human hand.

Paul warned of the polluters of the faith. *Act 20:29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Act 20:30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* This cannot happen if we pay attention to the truth and exercise God's gifts. It will happen if we lack knowledge and robust faith. Wolves always pick out the weak in the herd. Our prayer should be with the Psalmist *Psa 85:6 Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Psa 85:7 Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.* Perhaps we should start our gatherings with a prayer to that effect and include it in our daily worship.

The Scriptures 5

Part 18. Act 4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

I was caused to wonder this week, if the issues of Church marriage for Sodomites would have become such an issue if it were not for the State Church, the so called Church of England. Such issues would arouse less public interest if Churches were independent. Marriage was institutionalised by State religion and wedding rings play no part in marriage as the Puritans rightly pointed out.

God NOT man joins people together *Mar 10:9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.* God never gave any man the authority to declare people married. Christian marriage is a living picture of the relationship between Christ and His congregation, *Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.* This religious relationship defines marriage.

How did the Church give itself over to the State? Let us look at a key moment during the reformation. The title "Defender of the Faith" was given by Pope Leo X to King Henry VIII of England in 1521 for his stance against the reformation by Martin Luther. It was conferred in recognition of Henry's book *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (Defence of the Seven Sacraments), which defended the sacramental nature of marriage and the supremacy of the Pope. How ironic in view of his divorce. The coins of our realm still celebrate this hypocrisy by carrying the letters FD (Fid. Def. Defender of the Faith).

This Church of England was established by an Act of Parliament in 1534 by Henry VIII declaring that he was "the only supreme head on earth of the Church in England" and that the English crown shall enjoy "all honours, dignities, preeminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits, and commodities to the said dignity". The Church of England was founded on an anti-biblical marriage platform and it continues to be haunted by its wicked past.

Henry's Act of Supremacy was repealed (1554) by Mary I. It was reinstated Elizabeth I, when she who declared herself Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and instituted an Oath of Supremacy, requiring anyone taking public or Church office to swear allegiance to the monarch as head of the Church and state. The state Church has made it easy to manipulate religion but **it is a power God never gave to men.** *Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

We have seen from our studies how that the scriptures themselves have been hijacked to support particular forms of Church government, particularly the Church of England through the King James Bible which is biased towards an institutional structure of bishops and priests. In that climate of hostility to independent congregations, puritans, Baptists and independents were persecuted for centuries and religious freedom was denied to millions.

In the 1600's Members of Parliament continued to believe that a nation should be united by one religion, and Parliament was enacting laws strengthening the position of the Church of England, laws

that held that those who refused to receive the sacrament (communion) of the Church of England **could not** vote, hold public office, preach, teach, attend a university or assemble for meetings. How Christian is that? The state Church was compulsory. The Church of England was a closed shop run by a godless tyrant king whose interest centred more in his loins than his heart.

An extract from 'Andrew Barnett's History of Sedgley', referring to entries in the Parish Register in 1594 notes "Church attendance was compulsory and any failing to appear could be fined. Any who refused to go to Church were marked in the registers as 'Recusant' and reported to the Bishop. (Recusancy referred to those who refused to attend Anglican services.) Attendance did not always ensure good behaviour as some trouble-makers took their dogs and created diversions. Quiet dogs were left undisturbed, but unruly ones were dealt with by the dog catcher who had at hand, hanging on the Church wall, a large pair of tongs with which he removed the offending animals".

Some people walked around during the service and many a meeting must have been marred by bad behaviour on the part of discontented parishioners. Even the folk in the bell tower at times were blamed for disorderly ringing.

Although Church attendance was mandatory up to the year 1650 when it was abolished (under Oliver Cromwell), the Anglican Episcopalian Church was never all embracing. There is evidence to show that the very poor, rogues, vagabonds, masterless men, and beggars did not ever attend. In some instances parish relief had to be withheld in order to get the poor to attend. John Donne asked "How few of these who make beggary an occupation from their infancy were ever within Church, how few of them ever christened, or ever married?"

In 1657 compulsory Church attendance was restored but its ineffectiveness was evident after 1660 with the existence of non-conformists in the towns. The Anglican or state Church drew its congregation for the most part from the privileged 3 percent of the population or those with incomes of more than 100 pounds per year, such as peers, bishops, baronets, knights, esquires, gentlemen, greater and lesser office holders, merchants, traders and lawyers. It was an elite state Church.

You can see the damage that the state Church does and that it did not work to promote the kingdom of Christ but its own earthly monarchy and system. Which brings us back to our text as to whether the congregation of Christ has any head other than Christ? Let us first make a point about civil, societies laws. The civil governance of society is to be respected. *Luk 20:25 And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.*

The temple tax was almost paid with contempt Mat 17:25What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? *Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.* This was not a state tax.

It is quite clear that where things are under God's jurisdiction, such as worship, membership of His congregation, forgiveness of sin, marriage and evangelism, man has no authority. Even the monarch and ruler must be subject to these as is the ordinary citizen. These meddlers and changers of God's rules will not be able to claim a divine right of Kings to overturn God. They have no right to impose forms of worship, they have no right to define membership by christening, they have no right to pronounce forgiveness of sin, they have no right to declare you man and wife and they have no authority to stop you preaching the gospel of life.

Why then do we bow to these inventions of men? It is because we fear men and the King and honour God. To the contrary, we should FEAR God and honour the King. *1Pe 2:17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.* If we live our lives following the teachings of men when they are contrary to God, If we seek respectability in the herd that follows men, then we are nothing more than the crowd that one week waved the welcoming palms and the next week waved their whips.

Lets us finish our text, *Act 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. Act 4:20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* The apostles had made their judgement that the things of God took supremacy and they could not but talk about them. Christ was truly the head of their congregation as He should also be of ours.

How well did we do?

Part 19. Eph 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

The Church is a vehicle to manifest the Divine. The term "manifold wisdom" (πολυποικίλος σοφία) is a striking phrase. The adjective occurs only here, and means multicoloured. It is applied to pictures, flowers, garments. Ποικίλον is used in the Septuagint of Joseph's coat, Gen 37:3. *he made him a coat of many colours.* Through the Church, God's wisdom in its infinite variety is to be displayed - the many-tinted wisdom of God - in power, salvation, creation and glory. It is the rainbow to the eye of faith.

Has it succeeded in its mission? In the 1830's John Nelson Darby, a co-founder of the Plymouth brethren said "the Church is in ruins" lifeless beyond repair. From its promising start it has become unrecognisable in today's world.

The early New Testament Church held its earliest meetings in the Temple courtyard. *Act 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.* How bold is that? They meet in the backyard of the prevailing religion. It's a bit like a group of neo-Catholics meeting in Vatican square and teaching against the Pope. It was vibrant, on a mission, gifted and bold. Within a generation it had become a shadow of its former self. After many centuries it had become an institutional creature of human government.

We have seen how the Church grew into a man made monster of an Institution. The Puritans in their day opposed this and pressed for a more simple form of worship and congregational independence. Of course, the state Church, the CofE opposed it because they would have all been out of a job and a living. Whence their income then?

The institutional function also enabled Churches to be governed and these controls were just what the Monarchy needed as well. When the pilgrims left for New England and religious freedom, it was not long before they too raised the issues of state Church and became exactly what they had fled to avoid.

It will be noticed that when Christians break with denominations and set up on their own new groups, it is generally because they are trying to regain the vigour of Christianity. This does not though mean that they get back to what the early Church practiced. It is somewhat like the Reformation that takes the scarlet Catholic cow and paints it black. The changes are only superficial.

I like the translation of Hebrews 13 v 8 proposed by the scholar Andrew Downes for the KJV revision. Unfortunately it did not become included. *“Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to day the same and for ever”*. It is this unchangeable, non-evolutionary Christ who laid down the rules of religion which we have changed often so violently, that we have shamed His Name.

What then would He have to say about the Church today so far removed from its origins? We all think we are “right” with God and that we do “Christianity” well. I think not. We have in scripture a performance review of the Churches at the end of the first century. Christ addresses them in uncompromising terms about their current state. I speak of the 7 Churches of the Apocalypse. Let us DV over the next few weeks examine what the messages are and how they might be applied to our present day. Let us shrug off our complacency in the face of Christ’s challenge to overcome rather than succumb and see what the consequences of our failure mean for our future.

Did we do well? I don’t think so.

7 Churches overview

Part 20. Rev 2:26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

The 7 Churches lay in what is now Turkey. The letters written to them form part of the book of the Revelation of John given from Patmos, just off of the Turkish coast. It is as if John stands on the island viewing the events on the mainland. The letters are in effect a performance review of 1st Century Church life. I wonder how the modern Churches would be viewed.

The letters are given to the Churches through a messenger or ἄγγελος (angel). There is no reason to believe that this is a supernatural being. John the Baptist was an angel or messenger. *Mat 11:10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.* The messenger delivered or may have even read the message.

I wonder how many Churches today would receive a messenger that turned up with some of the messages here? I imagine the first reaction would be, “what is it to do with you?”, “how dare you come here criticising us?” I wrote to a Church once and got this response. “After consideration by the elders, it was decided that your “open letter” to the Church at Flint be returned to you unopened. We do not regard such an approach by you as having any validity within the Church at Flint”. I imagine some of the 7 Churches felt the same way.

We do not like criticism. Our hypocrisy is that we do not find fault with our selves but with others, not that that is wrong, but we must tackle our own “planks”. While the letters are addressed to Churches, the warnings are for individuals as are the blessings, “he that overcomes...” As an introduction to the 7 Churches I make the following observations.

- They (Churches) are individually and geographically addressed.
- They are not one national body or state Church (Church of Asia).
- There are NO denominations.
- They are addressed through a messenger (postman), not a Rev, Vicar, Minister, Archbishop or Bishop. There are no chiefs but Christ.
- They are self governing. They exist to “get on with it” where they live. They are not held responsible for other Churches.
- They have differing problems despite being geographically relatively close together.
- The problems do not relate to style of worship. No comment is made on this.
- Problems are attitudinal. Not so much what goes out but **what is let in to** the Churches.
- Christ is an invited guest.
- He rebukes in 5 out of 7 cases. Most Churches are not doing well.
- Individuals overcome within the Church.
- Being in a good Church doesn’t automatically rub off on individuals. Good and bad exist side by side. Antichrist comes from a Church. 1Jn 2:18 ...now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time..... They went out from us.

In each Church, the issue of “works” is addressed. What are “works”? Are these collective works or individual works? DV next time we shall look into more detail on this.

Works 1

Part 21. Rev 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

The works of each Church comes under scrutiny by Christ and those who fail risk their eternal life. *Rev 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.* How could this be that people who are in Churches fail to gain eternal life?

Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. James expounds the fact that anyone who lays claim to Christian faith will exhibit his faith by works. While works cannot buy faith, true faith once given will show works. The example James gives of works (Read Jas 2 vv 14 – 26) are:

1. Charity to God's people
2. Obedience to God's command even if it hurts you
3. Throwing your life in with God's people. **Charity, Compliance and Commitment.**

Works then can also encompass acts of obedience to God, not just handing out food parcels. Work may also be evil not just good. Christ will disown the workers of iniquity. *Luk 13:26 Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*

Works come in all shapes and sizes:

- Works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).
- Works of darkness (Eph. 5:11; Rom. 13:12).
- Works of evil (2 Tim. 4:18). 2Ti 4:18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom:
- Works of the devil (1 Jno. 3:8). 1Jn 3:8 For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.
- Hypocritical works – Mat 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works:

Mankind and the Churches cannot escape accountability for their actions. *Rev 20:12 ...another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their **works**.* Jesus gives us an insight into what He wants from us in the 25th Chapter of Matthews Gospel (**READ**). They are well known stories and generally go under the title of “the wise and foolish Virgins”, “The parable of the Talents” and “the sheep and the goats”. To make it a little simpler, I will reduce it further to three heads.

1. **Prudence,**
2. **Productivity,**
3. **Philanthropy.**

Prudence is about forethought, being prepared in life for the coming of Christ or the going to Christ. If it is not a preoccupation with the Christian, then I doubt if they are really interested in going to heaven. **Productivity** is about making the best use of what you have for the Master of the Kingdom. It is not about making the best of this life for you and we shall answer for this. **Philanthropy** means literally a lover of men, in this case our brothers and sisters in Christ and making efforts to help them.

Matthew 25 follows on from the chapter dealing with the end times. What is perhaps far more important than us speculating about end times, is making certain sure we survive them into the Kingdom.

Works 2

Part 22. Tit 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

What sort of people does Christ want us to be? What are the characteristics that we should see developing? One of the chief qualities is kindness. Christians should be kind just as their father is kind. *Psa 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.* **Grace** – God giving us **what isn't** deserved. **Mercy** – God not giving us **what is** deserved. Kindness is something we choose to give.

During the recent snow, it was noticeable how people made little effort to clear a path for their cars but were very happy to use the work of others. This selfishness is in antipathy with kindness. One person even decided to park his car on a piece of road we had cleared. I guess that people find it hard to get out of a selfish box that they live in and character change is something that does not come easily. I do not believe that kindness comes easily. I believe that it comes from thinking outside of our box. I love this example from the life of a servant.

*Jer 38:7 Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Jer 38:8 Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, Jer 38:9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. Jer 38:10 Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. Jer 38:11 So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. Jer 38:12 And Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, **Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords.** And Jeremiah did so. Jer 38:13 So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.*

Jeremiah had been put in a rotten jail unjustly. The Eunuch did not just get him freed, he did it comfortably. He made sure he did not get rope burns as he was dragged out.

How are kindness and grace related? We are: Kind to animals. Kind to those in need. Kind to strangers we meet on the street. kind and being nice are synonymous. Grace is harder. Grace is personal and carries a personal price. Grace is kind when kindness is undeserved. Grace is forgiveness even when it is unwarranted.

How do you rate yourself on a kindness scale? Mark yourself .

1. Good 2. Occasionally good 3, Need to work on this.

One is kind when:

- He is **honest** in his dealings Gen 21:23 Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee,
- He **rewards good** received from another Gen 40:14 But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:
- He is **sympathetic and comforting** Job 6:14 To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty.
- He exhibits **honourable behaviour** Rth 3:10 And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.
- He **shares another's burdens** 1Sa 15:6 And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.
- He shows **friendship** 1Sa 20:15 But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. He honours the dead (2 Samuel 2:5)
- He is **merciful toward his enemies** 2Sa 9:7 And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. He demonstrates loyalty (2 Samuel 16:17)
- He **shows gratitude** 1Ki 2:7 But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother.
- He **has compassion** Jon 4:2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.
- He is **benevolent** Luk 6:35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.
- He is **courteous** Act 27:3 And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.
- He is **hospitable** Act 28:2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.
- He is **forgiving** Eph 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

How did you do? I certainly have a lot to work on.

Works 3

Part 23. Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Just as a lamp illuminates a room, so does Christ shine through us to enlighten the world *Joh 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* We observe that it is not our works that enlighten men. Our works are nothing unless they spring from Christ. *Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* The text tells us that the light of Christ that shines from us and illuminates the works.

The world is in darkness. *Joh 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* This world of sin is the preparation for hell which is also a place without light. *Mat 25:30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* People in hell cannot see what they are doing. They are eternally blind.

The Christian who shines Christ on His works, glorifies God in heaven. What about those who do not shine Christ? Can there be good works that do not glorify God. I think so. Let me give you an example. There is an organisation called the "Samaritan's purse", no doubt drawing their name from the good Samaritan. They are kindly and well meaning but in my opinion are not overtly Christians. If you personally contribute these gift boxes to children overseas, you are not allowed to put religious items, bibles etc, in it. I take this as an example of a good work without a light.

Now I am not saying that we should trumpet our good works. *Mat 6:1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, **to be seen of them**: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.* This verse is about people who do good works to get personal praise. The Pharisees and hypocrites. It is doing works to "**be seen of them**". These works which are unlit by Christ are a different issue. You see, these are two, totally different motives for doing works. Self glory or God's glory.

The Christian is a lighthouse. I read a story this week about a merchant, Henry Winstanley, who lost 2 ships on the Eddystone reef, Plymouth, off the Devon coast. He decided to do something about it and built a lighthouse. During construction, a French privateer took Winstanley prisoner, causing Louis XIV to order his release with the words "France is at war with England, not with humanity". Unfortunately it wasn't a very strong lighthouse. Winstanley was recorded as having expressed great faith in his construction, going so far as to wish that he might be inside it during "the greatest storm there ever was". He got his wish in 1703 and died in the storm. I suppose this may serve as an illustration that even the illuminators do not escape unscathed in this life.

The Christian shines in the darkness of life and in doing so, warns against the reefs that destroy the passage of mankind. His works are lit for all to see as an example. How though does this glorify God? From the believer, there is the direct praise and thanks to God. We thank God for men like George Muller who set such an example of faith. It sets an example for all to see.

Works 4

Part 24. Gal 6:4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.

We have just examined the idea of pretending to be something we are not. Now we examine the idea of taking credit for other peoples work. Plagiarism is a word used to describe theft of another's work. (From.plagiarius "kidnapper, seducer, plunderer). I am always surprised when I read of Jacob's tithing. He had a really good deal *Gen 28:22and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee*. God gave him 10 tenths and he gives back 1 tenth. I guess it shows that God is not greedy since God is giving Jacob 9 tithes and the point I make is that sometimes our giving lacks any sacrifice.

We saw last week that our good works are illuminated by Christ in us. I had another thought associated with this, that perhaps it is the light of Christ that actually identifies to us what are our good works. We didn't identify the good works, so today I would like to remind us of what God expects of us as individuals as works. This is what we should look for and develop in ours lives, so it is proving your own work. Works are the things we do.

Works can be upholding and manifesting the Christian values in life, our attitude to those around us and supporting the society in which we are placed and in which we work. A Christian marriage is a witness in itself. Doing good to those outside of your family can have a powerful effect. Acts of forgiveness can be very powerful. Do you remember Gordon Wilson.

On 8 November 1987 a bomb planted by the Provisional IRA exploded during Enniskillen's Remembrance Day parade, injuring Wilson and fatally injuring his daughter, Marie, a nurse. An emotional television interview he gave to the BBC only hours after the bombing brought him to national and international prominence. In an interview with the BBC, Wilson described with anguish his last conversation with his daughter and his feelings toward her killers: "She held my hand tightly, and gripped me as hard as she could. She said, 'Daddy, I love you very much.' Those were her exact words to me, and those were the last words I ever heard her say." To the astonishment of listeners, Wilson went on to add, "But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night." As historian Jonathan Bardon recounts, "No words in more than twenty-five years of violence in Northern Ireland had such a powerful, emotional impact."

As with all things we do in Christian life, how we do things is often more important than the what. *Mar 12:41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. 1Jn 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

The big let down for Christianity is that many people, if not most people, do not see Christianity in Christians. The saving gospel of grace is totally isolated from the character of the person preaching it. The statement that most Christians are hypocrites is unfortunately true.

What is a good Church?

Part 25. Rev 1:20 The hidden meaning of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lamp stands is this: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven Churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven Churches. (see picture).

Having briefly looked at “Works” we return to the 7 Churches. Some have suggested that these Churches are prophetic of the Church in history, that is, how the Church would develop through the ages. I personally think that the Churches are a spectrum (7 colours) of contemporary Christianity that has meaning in all ages. It is above all, Christ addressing His people in the New Testament period. Either way there are lessons to be learned.

Only two Churches escape reproof, Smyrna and Philadelphia. If that is typical it means that most Churches are failing at some point, so if you think that going to a Church is going to fix YOUR problems, think again. *1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.* Churches might well say that we have enough problems of our own without adding yours to the list. It is not for someone else to work out my salvation, its down to me. *Php 2:12 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* That’s a Workout.

What are the characteristics of these 2 reproof free Churches? (Our Lord’s words in red).

Rev 2:8 And unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; Rev 2:9 **I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.** Rev 2:10 **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.** Rev 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Rev 3:7 And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; Rev 3:8 **I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.** Rev 3:9 **Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.** Rev 3:10 **Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.** Rev 3:11 **Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.** Rev 3:12 **Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is**

new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. Rev 3:13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

When I read the two sections relating to these Churches, something strikes me. They are very short letters. You may have met people who say that “The Lord said this to me today” and they seem to have a Twitter account with God. Yet when I look in my Bible, I find that God is not always engaged in a conversation with us. God is recorded as speaking to Abraham 7 times in 175 years.

1. When He instructed him to leave for Canaan and after he arrived (Gen.12 - spoke twice)
2. When He promised him the entire land of Canaan (Gen 13)
3. When He assured him he would have a biological heir (Gen 15)
4. When He instituted circumcision (Gen 17)
5. When He was about to judge Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19)
6. When He encouraged him to send Hagar and Ishmael away (Gen 21)
7. When He tested him with the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22)

That is once every 25 years. Perhaps it shows us that God may do more listening than talking and may communicate with us in different ways, for example, through providential events. Moses enjoyed a special relationship with God. *Exo 33:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.* It is not clear that the other Israelites had the same open channels.

In line with these thoughts, we see the letters to the 2 Churches before us, as very short. We might cry out in those congregations “O Lord, speak more to us, give us a bit more guidance please”. But there it was. Probably the only time Christ ever spoke to the Church in such personal terms, and it is all over in 5 or 6 lines. You see, I do not think that Churches are where God always speaks directly to us. He speaks through the gifts He has given to His people and His people praise Him in return through worship and obedience. Remember that we spend only about 1% of our lives as a Church and the other 99% living it out in the world (168 hours in a week).

Now, imagine that you are addressing any Church that you know and you have to do it in, say, 80 words (as to Smyrna). What would you say? It has to be to the point. Tackle the key issues. Advise and where necessary, rebuke. That is a tall order but keeping the message short is one way to make it go home. It is in the realm of the SMS (Short message system). In an article on “how to write e-mails” it advises:

“Even with the best of intentions, misunderstandings are likely to occur in almost any type of communication. Most professionals receive many emails every day. If the subject does not grab them they may not even open the email. Often recipients only read partway through a long message, hit “reply” as soon as they have something to contribute, and don’t keep reading. This is part of human nature..... The subject line is the single most important part of an email message, make sure you use it well. The subject line should sum up what the email is about”

These two letters are short and to the point. Christ knows the situation, so we don’t have to keep crabbing on about how bad things are and that Christ doesn’t appear to be listening to us. He knows

full well what we are going through and He has no real intention of taking out the bumps and potholes in life's roads. He doesn't, in the Church at Philadelphia say that He will make them a stronger Church. He says that they have a "little strength", literally, micro-dynamic. Yet that is enough for the task.

Churches do not have to be mega-dynamic, they have to be faithful. Because a Church is large, do not confuse size with quality. A quality Church may be undergoing real problems from without.

Message from the commander

Part 26. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

When we started to examine the NT Churches, we found that they looked very little like their modern counterparts. They were no longer simple gatherings but had assumed the status of institutions. You might therefore think that Churches were what the NT was all about, yet when it comes to the direct address from Christ, it covers 7 Churches in two chapters. Short messages.

The bulk of the book of Revelation is about the decline of humanity and the war against satan. *Rev 12:7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, Rev 12:8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

It will not have escaped you that the Christian is engaged in warfare. *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:* Keep this in mind as we examine the letters to the Churches. We are at war and have been since creation.

Now another point we should note is this, namely, that Christ is no longer the carpenter's son but the Kings Son and a King in His own right. *Rev 17:14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.* He does not portray Himself as the carpenter's son but as the Almighty enthroned in heaven. *Rev 4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*

So, then, what type of letters are these? The letters to the Churches are more a communication to those in battle rather than those in cosy worship. They are "Field Notes" or "Combat orders". They are short, as if to emphasise focus and they are to the point to emphasise urgency. As Admiral Nelson approached the French fleet in October 1805, he prepared a message for the fleet. In those days they had just invented signal flags, which was a great leap in communication. It was only a few years ago in 2001 that the RN closed the "Sail and Colour loft" at Chatham. Nelson asked his signal officer to run up a message: "NELSON CONFIDES THAT EVERY MAN WILL DO HIS DUTY". The officer replied that it would take too many flags as some words had to be spelled letter by each letter. He suggested that Nelson changed the message so that standard words be used. Nelson quickly agreed.

It became, “ENGLAND EXPECTS THAT EVERY MAN WILL DO HIS DUTY”. Messages do not have to be long to be important or relevant.

To continue the Naval analogy, the US Navy prefaces important message with the words “Now hear this”. Town criers use the words “Oyez” from the French oyer to hear or listen up. So also we find these words in every message to the Churches “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches*”. Are you paying attention to what the Spirit is saying?

So we are suggesting that the embattled Churches are being warned and encouraged by their Commander, Jesus. With this in mind we shall DV return to the message to Smyrna and Philadelphia and in particular what was happening on their part of the battlefield.

ENDNOTES

Letters and types of letter

- **Acknowledgment:** a letter telling you that someone has received something you sent them
- **air letter:** a letter written on one piece of light paper that is folded over to form a type of envelope and is sent by airmail
- **answer:** a written reply to something such as a letter or an advertisement
- **begging letter:** a letter asking for money, usually written by a poor person to someone they know is rich
- **chain letter:** a letter sent to several people asking them to send a copy of the letter to several other people. The letter often contains a threat that something bad will happen if it is not sent to other people or a promise of money if it is.
- **Circular:** a document, especially a letter or advertisement, that is sent to a lot of people at the same time
- **covering letter:** a letter that you send with something, to explain what you are sending or to give extra information
- **Dear John letter:** a letter that you send to a man to tell him that you are ending your sexual or romantic relationship with him
- **Enclosure:** something that is put in an envelope along with a letter
- **Epistle:** a piece of writing in the form of a letter
- **fan mail:** letters sent to a particular famous actor, singer etc by people who like them very much
- **form letter:** a standard letter that is used especially by businesses for a particular type of situation
- **hate mail:** extremely unpleasant letters sent to someone, containing threats or offensive remarks
- **love letter:** a letter telling someone how much you love them
- **missive:** a letter, especially a long or important one
- **newsletter:** written information sent regularly to members of an organization, containing news about events, activities etc
- **note:** a short letter to someone
- **open letter:** a letter that is addressed to a particular person or organization but is published in a newspaper so that everyone can read it
- **poison pen letter:** a cruel or offensive letter that has not been signed
- **recorded delivery:** a letter sent in this way
- **rejection:** a letter that tells you that you have not got a job or a place on a course of study
- **reminder:** a letter or note that reminds you of something that you need to do or need to remember
- **response:** a reply to any question or letter
- **round robin:** a letter or document signed by a lot of people, usually as a way of protesting about something
- **standard letter:** a letter written by a company or organization to send a reply or general information to many people
- a letter/message/book **of condolence:** a letter that you write or a book that you write in to show that you are sorry that someone has died

Essential characteristics of Military Combat Orders

a. Clarity. Use accepted military terminology. **b. Brevity. c. Simplicity. d. Completeness.**

e. Authoritative Expression. Orders reflect the commander's intention and will. Indecisive, vague, and ambiguous language leads to uncertainty. Subordinates are told in direct and unmistakable terms exactly what the commander wants them to do; they are not normally told how to accomplish it. **f. Timeliness.** Warning orders are issued and the one-third--two-thirds rule is observed. The **One-Third, Two-Thirds Rule** has been one of the mostly widely used planning and leadership tools employed by military leaders for decades. Its simple and incredibly powerful. Before making an assignment, consider the total time available for its completion. Allow yourself up to one third of the available time, thus allowing the people you lead the remaining two thirds. For example, if you have one hour to have the assignment completed, allow yourself twenty minutes to make lists, determine who should complete the assignment and determine the standards for completion. Allow the people you've given the assignment the remaining forty minutes.

What are we fighting for?

Part 27. 1Ti 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Returning to our look at the two Churches Smyrna and Philadelphia, we see that they are at war with satan. One week before His death Jesus said, *Joh 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.* Cast out from whence? Certainly not from the earth because he still works in the souls of men (Eph 2v2). I think the answer is, from the presence of God. Satan was among the sons of God *Job 1:6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.* For what reason God tolerated this rebel is not clear but it is part of the grand design of salvation and redemption.

There is a conflict that has run from the start of this world and it is based upon allegiance. It was whether the creature would serve his creator or whether the creature would serve himself. *Gen 3:5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* We see in Revelation chapter 12 an overview of the progress of Christianity (Read). The devil is amongst us and we are at war. But our weapons are not carnal *Eph 6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.* It is into this war that Churches of the Apocalypse are thrown.

Now let at what Smyrna and Philadelphia are doing. *Rev 2:10 be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life* and *Rev 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.* Notice that what they did was no great missionary work, built no buildings or institutions, provided no great philanthropies. No, what they did was hold their ground.

At the first battle of Bull Run, during the American Civil war, General Bee exclaimed to General Thomas Jackson. "The Enemy are driving us". Jackson is said to have replied, "Then, Sir, we will give them the bayonet." Bee exhorted his own troops to re-form by shouting, "There is Jackson standing like a stone wall. Let us determine to die here, and we will conquer. Rally behind the Virginians." This

exclamation was the source for Jackson's (and his brigade's) nickname, "Stonewall". That is an example to Christians.

These two Churches that do not get rebuked by Christ are battling the devil. *1Pe 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:* There is a religious group called the Christadelphians who do not believe that satan is a person, poor fools. There are many Christians too who do not see the threat either. We are fighting to hold the ground that Christ has won. When we give way, when our shield lowers we are struck by satan. The whispered words, the evils thoughts, the propensity for sin come to the fore and we are wounded.

When we are wounded spiritually, we sometimes are unaware of it, so subtle is it. It is like being bitten by a mosquito. You cannot feel it at the time but the consequences can be severe later. Sometimes those spiritual wounds transcend into our physical life *1Co 11:30 That's why many of you are sick and weak and why a lot of others have died.* CEV. There are consequences in our lives when we are unfaithful. When for example, we embrace unequal partnerships, when we deny the historic truth of scripture, when we embrace the humanist view of creation, when we deny the judgement of God and the uniqueness of Christianity and most of all when we make the Creator in our image, we have fallen. He that has ears to hear, let him hear.

The resistance movement 1

Part 28. Jas 4:7 Surrender to God! Resist the devil, and he will **run** from you.

The Bible clearly teaches that the way to deal with the devil is to stand up to him. *1Pe 5:9 Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.* The Christian Churches are a resistance movement. The devil has no strength of character and has no power over the believer other than the believer will give him. He is a liar and a murderer. *Joh 8:44 **Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*** Jesus is telling the religious leaders of His day that they have no heavenly father, only a demonic father.

Why have we lost the language of Jesus? What would Jesus have said about the paternity of those in the Anglican Church who stated "The Church of England supports the way civil partnerships offer same-sex couples equal rights and responsibilities to married heterosexual couples"? Same dad as the Pharisees. Satan. We are losing a sense of the reality of satan. Like all fallen creatures satan's imperfections are his downfall, he has no sound character and as such He is the archetypal coward and bully. Resist him and like all cowards and bullies he will leave you if you stand up to him. Christian warfare and Christian resistance are not fought with guns and bombs, they are fought with God's words. It may overflow into human violence but primarily that is not what it is about.

We may not make many friends in life if we stand against the devil, because most of the world is his servants. I like Franklin D. Roosevelt's saying "I ask you to judge me by the enemies I have made." Look at my enemies and judge me accordingly. When I became a Christian I saw my true friends. I

have never regretted the loss of those false friends who were really enemies. 1500 years ago, a Chinese general, Sun Tzu, said “that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperilled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperilled in every single battle”.

Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery finally defeated the German general Rommel, known as the Desert Fox at the Battle of El Alamein in 1942. History also tells us one reason why he did. General Montgomery had a picture hanging in his command tent where he could see it every day. It wasn't Winston Churchill. It wasn't the King of England. It was a picture of General Rommel. Montgomery didn't ever want to forget who he was fighting. Monty even named his dog Rommel. The American general Patton studied Rommel's book on tactics. Rommel returned the compliment: 'Montgomery never made a serious strategic mistake ... [and] in the Patton Army we saw the most astonishing achievement in mobile warfare.'

Christians should know their enemy and understand his methods because as we have said before, the Church is at war. The first thing is to recognise that the enemy is driving and controlling the souls of the unbeliever. You don't believe this? That nice old lady, the kindly misguided vicar. If they are not in Jesus they are in the devil. *Eph 2:2 You followed the ways of this present world and its spiritual ruler. **This ruler continues to work in people who refuse to obey God.*** GW. If you do not recognise and accept this you are open to all manner of temptations. *1Jn 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* When the chips are down, the world's children will turn on you and bite you, just as one week after the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the same people mocked at His crucifixion.

Our Lord Jesus Himself suffered a satanic attack at the start of His ministry and we do well to note the tactics in Mathew chapter 4. *Mat 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Mat 4:2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. Mat 4:3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Mat 4:4 But he answered and said, **It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.** Mat 4:5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, Mat 4:6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Mat 4:7 Jesus said unto him, **It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.** Mat 4:8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; Mat 4:9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Mat 4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, **Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.** Mat 4:11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

I believe that the devils temptations are typical of his method. The threefold attack has the following objectives:

1. Get to us when we are physically at a low ebb or by surprise.
2. Test providence and divine God's will by events (circumvent the Word).

3. Make us believe that we can bargain to get the most out of life (equal opportunities).

1. **The devil approached Christ when He was at a low ebb.** Like a pack animal the devil hunts the weakest in the herd. When we are feeling low, physically unwell, things do not appear to be going well in life, when we are tired or hungry, then we are vulnerable. The style of life we lead, who we mix with, too much alcohol, what we read, what we watch and so on can all make us vulnerable to attack. We will cast the Word of God aside for self-gratification, even though we know it is wrong. We cast the Word of God aside because it is too much effort and choose the easy reading, happy clappy daily notes, requiring little mental digestion, that are the spiritual equivalent of a bag of crisps.

Christians who feed poorly, train little and care less are easy pickings for the devil.

Obviously, the first defence is to avoid certain circumstances, but such is life that it is not always possible. Yet we must recognise that there are times that we are more susceptible than others. If we cannot learn to live “but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”, we shall die at the hand of the devil. We need to try and recognise when we are vulnerable.

The resistance movement 2

Part 29. Job 1:9 Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?

We continue to look at the remaining temptations of Jesus where we saw the threefold attack which has the following objectives:

4. Get to us when we are physically at a low ebb. *Mat 4:3 If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*
5. Test providence to prove you are God’s child and divine God’s will by events. *4:6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down*
6. Make us believe that we can bargain to get the most out of life *Mat 4:9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

The devil insinuates that Job only fears God because God offers him something in return. This is still a lie and prompts satan to encourage abuse of providence and offer the world for allegiance.

2nd Temptation. We are prone to bargain with God and test providence or divine His will. If I do such and such and it happens, it means God is with me. People find a text that supports their feelings (the flip...plop approach) and call this “guidance”. It is no more than a blind man’s compass. The devil will encourage us to test the laws of physics on the basis that God, heaven forbid, would let his children suffer the slightest injury (like any good parent).

It is this spirit of invulnerability that sends the young to an early grave and beyond the hope of redemption. This attitude is also a bit like trial by ordeal. Trial by ordeal is a judicial practice by which the guilt or innocence of the accused is determined by subjecting him to an unpleasant and usually dangerous experience. Classically, the test is one of life or death and **the proof of innocence is survival**. In some cases, the accused is considered innocent if he escapes injury or if his injuries heal. Ordeal by water was later associated with the witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, although in this scenario an accused who sank was considered innocent, while floating indicated witchcraft.

So, if you were to succumb to this temptation of the devil and throw yourself off of a building, your blood soaked splattered remains on the pavement below would suggest that you were not a son of God. When we succumb to this foolishness we ask God to break His law. We ask God to break or suspend the laws of physics. I do not need to do this to prove my sonship. I know that my redeemer lives.

The devil in Peter tempted him to break the Divine plan. *Mat 16:22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* Peter's seeming good deed, was a devil inspired attempt to stop the crucifixion and the sacrifice upon which the salvation of mankind pivoted. Good works should sometimes be judged by their **long term outcome**.

3rd Temptation. God does not bargain to get our allegiance. The devil takes men's minds because they are taken with the here and now and the short term. The devil in reality promises a broken world on the conveyor belt to destruction. Some offer! The devil promises the world for service to him. What's it worth?

I want to open up further the nature and extent of the satanic deception. Until men are born again, the devil works in their lives *Eph 2:2 ...the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:* The consequence of this is that the devil's children will be adversaries to God's children. The level of conflict will vary but it will always be there. *1Jn 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* What John is saying is, "no surprises there then".

The degree to which satan is in control of peoples lives varies from outright possession *Luk 9:42 And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father,* to the silent suggestion of false goodness *Mar 8:33 But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.* Satan's whisper to Peter was to break the Divine plan under the guise of a good work. Surely, saving Jesus from death was a noble thought? No, it was condemning all mankind to hell if Jesus did not die.

If you don't believe me that the devil did evil through us, then talk to Christians who will tell you what awful things they did when the devil ruled their lives. It is a reality we need to acknowledge. If we do not acknowledge the extent of this evil around us, it will only be a short while before it becomes an innocuous part of our lives. The devil is good at hiding where Churches are *Rev 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.* The antichrist comes from the Church, *1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us;*

Satanism may pose as religion but mark this. Satanism is not a religion that people sign up to, it is a way of life they are born into. We live in a satanic society and he infiltrates the Churches where he is good at hiding. Here is a chilling tale from Charles Spurgeon.

A most interesting but tragic incident occurred concerning one of Spurgeon's proposed elders. A man had been suggested for the office of elder; others, however, felt him unsuitable for the office. Consequently, he did not receive the appointment. The man proved to be a negative influence in the life of the Church. He often did his best to annoy and offend the pastor. He was unsuccessful, but nevertheless the problem persisted. One Sunday, when he had been particularly troublesome, Spurgeon said to him, "Brother . . . will you come and see me tomorrow morning?" The man replied in an angry way, "I have got my living to earn, and I can't see you after 5:00 in the morning." Spurgeon replied, "Oh! That will suit me very well, and I will be at your service and have a cup of coffee ready for you tomorrow morning at 5:00am."

When the hour arrived, Spurgeon received the man. As usual, the disgruntled brother had a complaint to lodge. He complained he had lost £25 (equivalent to £1500 at 2013 prices), a fair sum of money, serving the Church. But everyone said that it had been his own private speculation and the Church had no involvement in it at all. He indignantly grumbled that he could not afford to lose such a large sum. Immediately Spurgeon counted out live £5 notes and gave them to the man. He wanted to know, of course, if they had come out of Church funds. Charles replied, "No, I feel that you cannot afford such a loss and though it is no concern of mine I willingly give you the money." The pastor related, "I saw a strange look come over his face, but he said very little more, and I prayed with him and he went away.

At 5:00 in the afternoon he sent around for my brother to go to see him. When he returned, he said to me, 'Brother, you have killed that man by your kindness, he cannot live much longer. He confessed to me that he had broken up two Churches before and that he had come to the Tabernacle Church on purpose to act in the same way and he had especially sought to put you out of temper with him, - which he never could do,-and he told me he was a devil and not a Christian. I said to him, 'My brother once proposed to have you as an elder of the Church.' He seemed very surprised and asked me, 'Did he really think so much of me?' I answered, 'Yes; but the other elders said that you had such a dreadful temper that there would be no peace in their midst if you were brought in to them.'

The story ended when the man committed suicide by cutting his throat. Spurgeon said, "I felt his death terribly and the effect of it upon the people generally was much the same as when Ananias and Sapphira were slain because of their lying unto the Holy Ghost: 'Great fear came upon all the Church and upon as many as heard these things.' I had often spoken of killing people by kindness' but I never wish to have another incident of it in my own experience." The incidents of the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the days of the Tabernacle ministry were astounding.

A satanic society is a controlling society that aims to replace God and His rules with the policies of the devil. That is where it all went wrong at the beginning. It creates social values (Conservative family values sic!), It regulates truth (in science, in business). It regulates free speech. It regulates life (abortion, care pathways), It destroys marriage (the image of the Church), it is pantheistic (all your beliefs are important and all beliefs must be respected), it uses pseudo science to explain behaviour (psychiatry, astrology, crystals, feng shui etc). It is the war maker. It centralises welfare, it becomes the parent, it rewards indolence. It controls money (forgery), it controls markets. It creates morality (in opposition to God), The so called social evils are propagated by the very people who claim to be solving them. The devil is a liar and he is in governments all over the world.

The devil is all about short term gain and never the eternal consequences of our actions. The devil is about easy answers and simple solutions. Yet towering above all these is the great ambition to make all men despise and reject the words of the Creator.

The Holy War

Part 30. Rev 17:14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

We have been looking at the damage that satan is doing in the world and how the devil provides parachutes that don't work. His purpose is to undermine the creation and take it for himself. The two Churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia are commended for their stand against satan.

I read this week that Government Chief Scientific Adviser John Beddington is stepping up the war on pseudoscience with a call to his fellow government scientists to be "grossly intolerant" if science is being misused by religious or political groups. In closing remarks to an annual conference of around 300 scientific civil servants on 3 February, in London, Beddington said that selective use of science ought to be treated in the same way as racism and homophobia. "We are grossly intolerant, and properly so, of racism. We are grossly intolerant, and properly so, of people who [are] anti-homosexuality. I wrote a challenge to this satanist Beddington but I did not get the courtesy of a reply¹.

¹ From: Mike Winnett Sent: 25 March 2013 13:14
To: 'j.beddington@imperial.ac.uk'
Subject: Web article in RESEARCH

Dear Dr Beddington.

I refer to a section of a document quoted in Research (for reference see at the end of this document) and attributed to you.

I whole heartedly agree with your remarks on pseudoscience and that we should be "grossly intolerant" if science is abused by religious or political groups.

You say that "selective use of science ought to be treated in the same way as racism and homophobia". Since you draw on racism and homophobia to illustrate pseudoscience, I would be very grateful if you would supply me with the scientific method that arrives at your conclusions, namely, that it is proper to be intolerant of these things (racism and homophobia).

Thank you in anticipation of your response, Yours sincerely, Michael Winnett

ARTICLE QUOTED:

http://www.researchresearch.com/index.php?option=com_news&template=rr_2col&view=article&articleId=1032320

You may have missed the devil's leap of faith there. In that diatribe is the idea that somehow racism and homophobia have some basis in rational science and are to be accepted. What? Racism and homophobia are two different things but if there is to be some acceptance or rejection of either, what is the scientific basis for that? Who makes that rule? Beddington is the devil's donkey.

Christianity cannot let these things pass yet to the contrary it is assimilating them rather than rejecting them. To condone them is to be a partaker of them *2Jn 1:11 Greeting them is the same as taking part in their evil deeds.CEV.* So let us remind ourselves of some of the old truths, this Easter Sunday. **The first truth** is this, *1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; If we had not sinned, had not broken God's laws, there was no need for His death. The reason for His death is that it was the only acceptable way that the Creator would deal with sin. We could not do it ourselves as the Easter hymn states,*

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| There was no other good enough | He died that we might be forgiven, |
| To pay the price of sin | He died to make us good, |
| He only could unlock the gate | That we might go at last to Heav'n, |
| Of heaven and let us in. | Saved by His precious blood. |

This is not a universal salvation. It is not applied to the unbelieving, the dead, or the fallen angels. It is not applied as whitewash over the evil deeds of humanity. It does not expunge the evil of history or turn back time to make all things as they were. The memorial to this world burns for ever as a reminder *Rev 19:3 And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.* Just as Lord orders the death of Christ, He orders its distribution.

The second truth is that the death of Christ, in and of itself does not change the status quo as far as evil is concerned. Redemption, that is the death of Christ, the blood of Christ," must needs be applied to us. A criminal may walk out of court a free man but he is still in his nature a criminal. He still has a criminal's mind so his mind must be changed. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

This is why the resurrection is so important. A dead Christ, however great the sacrifice, gives none of that benefit to us unless He is alive to do it. *Rom 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.* It confers upon us the "Newness of Life". *Rom 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

The resurrection of Jesus elevates Him above all creatures as the one with power over life itself. *Joh 10:18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.* He shares His immortality *1Ti 6:16 Who only hath immortality.*

The third truth is that we start our New Life by going to war. Salvation is recruitment. Not everyone in an army is a frontline soldier. There is logistics, medical, transport, weapons, planning etc. but all make a contribution. It seems to me that many Churches today are nothing less than hostels where

people are hanging about waiting to go to heaven. I remember someone once described Sidmouth in Devon as “God’s waiting room”. I think that describes many of the Churches today. Cosy retreats where they are isolated from reality.

Christ did not ask of us that we go gently into that bright eternity of everlasting life. He gave us a cross Luk 14:27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. George Bennard wrote a famous hymn “The old rugged cross” and later in life in honour of this the Chamber of Commerce erected a cross near his home.

So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross, Till my trophies at last I lay down; I will cling to the old rugged cross, And exchange it some day for a crown.

If we are not prepared to oppose evil, we will find the truth that Martin Niemöller spoke of (Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me). It doesn’t matter how big, how important, how well connected, how eloquent, how educated, how powerful the opposition to Christ, they can be brought down before Him. The story of David is a reminder that what stands between victory and defeat is who we come with. *1Sa 17:45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.*

Easter marks the devil’s downfall and the beginning of his end.

The other woman

Part 31. Rev 2:4 but I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love. Darby.

Recap: The 7 Churches not linked through a State Church, they are Independent, no invented titles. They are now around 40 years old and possibly second generation believers.

Ephesus problem is not the indifference of the Laodicean Church, a lukewarmness to the faith. It is leaving the first love, that is, what was first is no longer first. It is like the lamentation of God for Israel who were drawn in other directions *Jer 2:25 for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.* Young Churches are often vibrant in that first love and age and familiarity have dulled it.

Life is full of short term attractions although some may last. Some may become obsessions and I would most certainly hope that those who come to Christ become obsessed with Him. For many, the romance with Christ starts passionately. It is a love story like meeting your wife for the first time and I hope for your sake there was and will be passion there. You couldn’t do enough for her or him, you couldn’t wait to meet, much of your time was taken up in that new relationship. Then it slips in to the familiar and then into the mundane. The love is gone. It reminds me of something a person joked to me just before I got married. He said, “Before you get married you wish you could eat her, then six month’s after, you wish you had”.

What are the symptoms of spiritual declension, of leaving the first love? Who are the affairs with? I think that it can happen without knowing it. We can be come so practiced in religion that it becomes

a habit. The odd prayer, reading and saying grace. The obligatory Church attendance all designed to make us feel that we are on track to heaven, when the reality is, our thoughts are elsewhere. Religion becomes a daily habit like reading the Bible notes or a newspaper. People doze through sermons thinking of other pursuits and as soon as it is over switch off religion and switch on the world. Love is elsewhere.

Why does Jesus become less attractive? I think we can detect the loss of the first love when our priorities change. When we would rather be doing something else, anything else, with anyone else rather than having Christ as our focus. Let me illustrate. I like tennis and many years ago, I won tickets for the 1985 Wimbledon final between Boris Becker and Kevin Curren. The match was played on a Sunday and to see it, I would have had to have skipped our Sunday meeting. As I recall, it was a really beautiful summer's day. Now, I knew that it was a question of where my priorities lay. You may say, well, it was an opportunity of a lifetime so why not **just once**? I know too well that "just once" is the key to "occasionally" and that opens the door of "always". I let someone else have the tickets and at this distance in time I am so glad that I did. It is valueless where I now stand in time. My priorities are with Christ and His people, not with the world and its fading attractions.

I read last week that they had released one of Captain Scott's letters. He became a National hero after his tragic death in Antarctica. Let me read it to you.

My Dear Sir Francis,

I fear we have shipped up - a close shave. I am writing a few letters which I hope will be delivered some day. I want to thank you for the friendship you gave me of late years, and to tell you how extraordinarily pleasant I found it to serve under you.

I want to tell you that I was not too old for this job. It was the younger men that went under first.

Finally I want you to secure a competence for my widow and boy. I leave them very ill provided for, but feel that the country ought not to neglect them. After all we are setting a good example to our countrymen, if not by getting into a tight place, by facing it like men when we were there.

We could have come through had we neglected the sick.

Good-bye and good-bye to dear Lady Bridgeman

Yours ever R. Scott. Excuse writing - it is -40, and has been for nigh a month

Now the part that moved me were the words "**We could have come through had we neglected the sick.**" There would have been a temporal victory if he had neglected the weaker members of the group but he rose above ambition to stay with those he loved. I don't think Robert Falcon Scott was as committed in faith as the other members of his expedition (Henry "Birdie" Bowers and Edward Wilson were committed Christians who died with Scott on 29th March 2012), however Scott displayed a remarkable example of Christian loyalty.

It reminded me of the great Moses, *Heb 11:25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.* He was looking **ahead** to his reward. Not down at what he had or backward to where he had come from. What seems to matter now will cause us to wonder why we were so careful of it.

On our great Christian trek to the centre of our faith, we are often sidetracked by the so called pleasures of life. We find other interests. Some people call them pastimes, a word I hate because life should not be so empty for a Christian that he has to “pass time” to get through it. Worst of all we are neglecting our soul. If we could see the state of our souls by some outward analogy, we should see many Christians covered in dirty rags. They would look neglected which of course is what they are.

The Ephesian Church had started so well, so enthusiastically, so well structured and educated at the feet of the great Apostle Paul, yet here they are, perhaps the next generation a mere shadow of their founders and all that they stood for. If it were possible, I imagine that Spurgeon, Whitfield, Wesley, Booth, and a host of others would writhe in their graves if they could see the state of Christianity today. It is a ghost of its former self in this land.

Jesus speaks to Ephesus thus, *Rev 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: Rev 2:3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.* You see, they were doing all the right things. The “Churchy” things. The stand up, standard, righteous Sunday things. The outward stand against wrong and evil.

They could pass for many Churches today, full of good upright people. Yet when it came down to that real, bona fide love of Jesus, well, it wasn't there any more.

The Ephesian Church had cultivated a liturgy. It looked all right on the outside but the life within was flickering. We need to learn the lesson that it is not the life on the outside that counts but the life on the inside. Lively Churches and noisy Churches are not necessarily Churches that are alive to Christ. Its not the Church in my life, it's the LIFE in me that counts.

Messy Church

Part 32. *Rev 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*

This is being written some 40 years or so after Paul came to Ephesus. Those who were 20 were now 60 and those who were 40 were 80. Some may have not been born when Paul came. Suffice to say it is a Church growing old. Old age is not a pleasant thing *Ecc 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;* It should however be a time for harvested wisdom of a life well lived. Yet how many old Christians do you see with fire in their belly? Marilyn Monroe sang, “Men grow cold as girls

grow old and we all lose our charms in the end." Does it have to be a winding down of life? Did the Ephesians just grow old? Is age an excuse for taking life easy? I am encouraged by men of God who die in harness, like for example:

At the age of 87 years, John Wesley preached his last sermon, "On Faith," in mid-January 1791. On Feb. 24 he dictated his final letter, a message of encouragement to abolitionist William Wilberforce. On March 1 the dying Wesley astonished those present by singing Isaac Watts' hymn, "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath." The next day, surrounded by lay preachers, he rallied enough to say, "Best of all, God is with us." He then whispered, "Farewell," and was gone.

At the age of 93 years George Muller preached his last sermon on Isaiah's Vision on March 6, 1898 at Alma Road Chapel in Clifton. On March 10, 1898 the maid went to his room, and found him dead on the floor by the side of his bed, apparently taken while praying. The funeral in Bristol on March 14th has never been surpassed there, as tens of thousands lined the streets. The grief of the orphans was evident. At the age of seventy, Mr. Muller began to make great evangelistic tours and with his wife travelled 200,000 miles in 17 years of world-wide evangelism efforts, in 42 countries, preaching to 3 million people.

At the age of 83 years in 1912, William Booth was active as ever. The year 1908 found him in Scandinavia, 1910 in Switzerland, Holland, Germany, Italy, and Denmark. On May 9, 1912, he gave his last major speech to 7,000 Salvationists at London's Albert Hall. As his aged eyes became weak, an unsuccessful operation was performed on May 23rd 1912. Two days later it was found that he had an infection and that he would lose his sight completely. "God knows best. I have done what I could for God and the people with my eyes. Now I must do what I can for God and the people without my eyes."

When asked for the secret of his success, William Booth said: I will tell you the secret. **God has had all there was of me.** There have been men with greater brains than I, men with greater opportunities. But from the day I got the poor of London on my heart and caught a vision of all Jesus Christ could do with them, on that day I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was. And if there is anything of power in the Salvation Army today, it is because God has had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life.

In accordance with a widely felt desire, the body of the General lay pavilioned in state at The Congress Hall, Clapton, on the Friday, Saturday and Monday following his passing, when some 150,000 grief-stricken people passed the bier to gaze upon the ivory-like features of "the world's best-loved man." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Mp9OkRcMY8> The Mayor of South Shields had described him as "The Archbishop of the World."

A public memorial service was arranged at Olympia on the following Wednesday (28 August 1912), when 35,000 people attended. Queen Mary, sat next to an ex-prostitute, a convert of General Booth's. Traffic in London stopped for two hours as his funeral procession of 10,000 marching Salvationists went through the city streets. I mention this because you may have seen the state funeral of Baroness Thatcher, where far fewer paid their respects publicly.

If Ephesus is an example of an old Church, it stands as a warning to us today. In the face of declining numbers people are grasping at all sorts of straws to increase growth. One I saw this week was called "Messy Church". <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22141524> What is Messy Church (I quote them)?

"It is an all-age Church where everyone is valued equally. It provides an informal environment for all-ages to explore and experience faith and worship through crafts, food and celebration. It describes each and every one of us, as no one is perfect and **each of us lead messy lives for many reasons**. It invites us to come together, making things together, eating together and celebrating God together. Messy Church is NOT just a craft club! Messy Church is NOT just for children! Messy Church is for everyone – young & old alike, come with friends, family or partners, or come on your own, everyone is welcome. (Please note, all children must be accompanied by an adult)." <http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/Messy-Church>

It is McDonalds with the golden arches replaced by golden crosses. In other words it is another gimmick to attract people with out Jesus. Did you see Jesus is their blurb? No neither did I. The congregation of God's people, the Church, does not exist to provide comfortable religion for unbelievers. Lest we forget, its is preaching we need not games. *1Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the **foolishness of preaching** to save them that believe.* What is lacking in our day are preachers not entertainers!

Jesus never said to Ephesus that their religion needed spicing up. They lacked entertainment. Nothing for kids to do. Not enough eating together. Too few hymns. That they would never attract people in unless they became more fun. If the light of Ephesus was going out, it was because Jesus was not shining through them. *Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world.* The answer quite clearly was to get the relationship with Jesus right. If unbelievers don't want Jesus, it is because they cannot see Him. *2Co 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* The Church is not a hostel for the unbeliever or a source of entertainment and a diversion in life.

If Churches are declining, if their **lampstand** (the support for their light) has been removed, no attempt to replace it from a secular initiative can work. Only the light from Christ Himself as the centre of worship and the centre of our lives works. You can have teaching, spiritainment, numbers, works and all manner of activity yet lose the love. All of that does not outweigh the loss of love. You can be rigorous in doctrine yet dead in faith.

I know of people who used to attend Westminster chapel under Martin Lloyd Jones. They were very well educated up to a point. It was a gathering place for middle class non-conformists, a sort of elite Church. Yet I noticed this. There were great gaps in their knowledge. Why? Because they got most of their input from Lloyd Jones. He provided the major part of their food and they relied upon it. Many Christians are in the same position of making little effort themselves and relying on others. I call it welfare Christianity. They live on spiritual handouts and do nothing for themselves. They are the unemployed mass of Christianity. An army without weapons. Christianity as we have said so many times in these studies is about my relationship with Jesus. All else in life springs from that single

relationship, that starting point. How we worship, where we worship, what we do all comes from that point. As William Booth said, “**God has had all there was of me**”. It was about that personal relationship with the Saviour that gave life its purpose.

Let me give you an analogy. You wouldn't have a relationship with the woman you loved, conducted by proxy. Let me explain. You wouldn't arrange an evening out with your wife and send someone along in your place. You wouldn't let someone else go out on a date with her? Then you wouldn't catch up with that person one day of the week to find out what they did on their date. You wouldn't send gifts and flowers through the hand of an intermediary or a surrogate boyfriend. Let me tell you, that is how it is mostly done in the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church is not far behind. It is like a marriage and that is how it is described in Ephesians, except in this marriage you let someone else play your part.

Other paid professionals do it for you. Religious gigolos² have taken over from “we the people of God” We employ, mark that, we employ people to look after our religious interests and call them Reverend or Pastor. You find me where they had a paid ministry in the NT? Yet it gets worse for Catholics. Not only do they send someone (priest) out on the date in your place, they expect to meet a surrogate from the other side as well. Jesus sends Mary. What a mess?

Let's remind ourselves that Church is about believers in a community. Sharing lives NOT sharing pews on a Sunday. Never confuse “going to Church” with “being a Church”. True religion is about giving to the poor, the needy and widows and orphans. Being a Christian is about the life and love of Christ actively working in us. Our obsession about outward respectability and forms of worship masks the spiritual poverty that Churches wallow in. Its no longer about Our Lord Jesus, its about our sense of satisfaction. Its not about that personal relationship.

The Ephesians had no excuse because it was in their letter, “How we should relate to Jesus”. *Eph 5:29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: Eph 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Eph 5:33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

It's a marriage. Man/woman, Jesus/Church. Christ is a husband to us and His relationship with the Church is a template for marriage. Can you imagine marriages working without spontaneity? If everything had to be done in some ordered form like Church services, some longwinded liturgy no wonder it gets boring. Perhaps that is why “Church” can often be so boring and marriages so dull. However, trying to spice up a marriage by dressing it up in saucy lingerie (messy Church) is approaching an inner problem by an outward disguise. It requires a return to the roots and to start doing it right again. There is no need for spice in a true relationship. The need is to revisit those primary values and get back what has been left behind, not invent some mind numbing alternative.

²A gigolo is a male escort or social companion who is supported by a woman in a continuing relationship.

Ephesus had not left its religion. Ephesus had left its first love.

Bonfire of the Vanities

Part 33. Rev 2:3 and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

The question was raised after our last ministry as to whether the Ephesians would lose their salvation because they left their first love. To answer this, we must see that there are two parts to our Christian lives. What Christ does for us and what we do for Christ. Firstly what Christ does for us is the foundation of our eternity. *Rom 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* God reconciled us when we were His enemies and thus he will save us to the uttermost. *Rom 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.* **God saves His enemies.** *Rom 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.* **I am saved by blood, His blood and never by what I do.**

Secondly what we do with that foundation is a separate issue. How we build our lives on that foundation expresses our faith. *1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation....(read whole passage).* What sort of life do we lead and what do we produce upon that foundation? Well, let us note that whatever you build can never improve your salvation. It can never enhance the work of Christ and it can never alter it. That work of Christ is eternally perfect. Salvation may indeed, however, be out worked. *Php 2:12 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* We can work it out but we can never work upon it to improve it.

There are two fires approaching humanity. One fire burns eternally and eternally consumes (Hell), the other is one where our life works are purged and tested. Strange to say but everything we do in Christ is ultimately thrown into the fire. We all have a cremation in the end even if it is only our works. All the good, the gold, the silver and the hay, wood and stubble. Then what is left? For some just a heap of ashes. For some, all that they did in this life is lost except that one precious object that God gave them. Jesus Christ. That man comes away from the ruins of his life, not empty handed, he comes away with his salvation intact. *1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.* **Salvation is secure.**

Samuel Medley (1738-1799) wrote **“On Christ, salvation rests secure; The Rock of Ages must endure; Nor can that faith be overthrown. Which rests upon the “Living Stone.”**

In Italy in the 15th century, on certain religious occasions, for example Mardi Gras (Mardi gras is French for Fat Tuesday, referring to the practice of the last night of eating richer, fatty foods before the Lent festival), people would create a fire and burn objects that might tempt them to sin, including vanity items such as mirrors, cosmetics, fine dresses, playing cards, and even musical instruments. Other targets included books that were deemed to be immoral and manuscripts of secular songs, as well as artworks, including paintings and sculpture. It was called the **Falò delle vanità** or Bonfire of the Vanities. I guess that if we burnt more of our own vain lives now, we might have more to show when we go through God's bonfire of our vanities.

So I conclude that the Ephesians do not lose their personal salvation but they may well lose their ability to bear the light of Christ in their generation, due to the loss of their first love. Did you also notice that Jesus never made it a condition of our salvation that we had to love Him? There are no conditions except “repentance”, turning from sin. However I would say that if that love did not develop as a result of His sacrifice, then there is something really wrong in the relationship. If we don’t love him, then we should seriously be questioning where we stand. *1Jn 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.* It is a Proof of Life. It leads on to obedience *Joh 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.* That love was no longer on top of the Ephesians “priority List”. They may still have had love for Jesus but it wasn’t first any more.

The Ephesians, according to our text, “hast laboured, and hast not fainted”. They are active as a Church but as we have shown, activity is not equal to love. A husband may go out and earn a living to support a family but he may not really love them. He does it out of duty not love. You might think that many Churches who hold so close to the letter of Ephesians, for its doctrinal content, would take heed of where they were 40 years later. Some Churches today have Ephesians and Romans as their centre pieces of theology. I speak of the so called Evangelical “reformed” Churches, although as we know from our studies they didn’t do too much reforming. We went to one of these Baptist Churches, not long after we became Christians.

When I look back on the experience, it was all about outward appearances. Everyone dressed with the same respectability. Same format, same hymn book, same times, same collection box and then everyone disappeared to where they came from for another week. If I am honest, I guess that I only knew about 3 people in that Church. The only thing that they kept pushing at me was to become a member of their Church. Baptism and membership were the key issues. No active discipling. It didn’t seem to matter what was going on in my life the rest of the time or even what my life with Christ was like. No one ever asked me, it was always assumed to be OK. They would have said that they were a biblical Church but I can tell you, they were a comfortable Church. When I questioned why they didn’t do certain things in the Bible, even the pastor said I was right but they were not going to change. It was too discomfoting for them.

Well, you may be thinking, how do I find a good Church, what is it like? If the great Ephesians had problems, is it all doomed to failure? Firstly, you have to get it out of your head that you have to GO to Church. Church was never a place that you GO to. The Church is a body of Christ’s people who meet to build each other up, share God’s gifts, worship together and remember His death. There is a need to meet with God’s people. *Heb 10:24 And let us consider one another to **provoke unto love and to good works**: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but **exhorting one another**: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* Do you gather with people who do that?

Church is about any Christian, any time, anywhere getting together. *Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* If those meetings do not exhort, provoke love and good works, what are they for? If they are not IN JESUS NAME, then in whose name are they? Church is not about a formal gathering for a structured liturgy. Churches

don't save you and there will be those saved, like the man on the cross, who never went to Church. Churches are the expression of a life lived with Christ.

I think that the Ephesians had lost that spark of informality and spontaneity.

Sex and the City of Pergamos

Part 34. Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam.

I have met people who hate doctrine because, they say it stifles love or that it is a harsh and rigid application of truth that undermines or lacks grace. Liberals in the Church will hate doctrine as it constrains their alternative beliefs. They say doctrine is legalism. So I want to define the word doctrine at the outset. The word "Doctrine" comes from the Latin doctrina, from doctor, teacher doctre, to teach. It translates the greek word διδαχή (didache) which you will all know if you have heard the word didactic. We might say of someone that "he is very didactic" by which we mean that he is inclined to teach or moralize excessively, which in our age is no bad thing. We can say that Jesus was didactic and in fact he is called so by Nicodemus. *Joh 3:2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher (διδάσκαλος) come from God:*

The liberals who would deprive us of doctrine fail to realise that there is a legal element to it. When Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees about His person, he makes a doctrinal statement *Joh 8:23 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. Joh 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, **ye shall die in your sins.*** That is also a legal statement. It is pragmatic, doctrinal, didactic and legal. There is no way that it can or will be changed. If you do not believe that Jesus is who He says he is, you will die in sin. Period.

I have laboured the point to show that Doctrine is nothing other than teaching associated with belief. It is case and consequence. We can call any teaching that a group of people hold as a doctrine. We could call Darwin's evolutionary "guess" a doctrine, since it is taught and believed by sinful people with low intelligence. We could call homosexuality a doctrine because that too is taught and believed by godless people. They cannot of course give you an absolute reason why this is the way we should behave. We can call anti-homosexuality a doctrine also because it is taught and believed by Christians. Now how do we determine what is the correct doctrine on that subject? We go of course to the origin of Christian doctrine, Christian teaching, the Bible and see what it has to say on the subject.

Lev 18:22 It is disgusting for a man to have sex with another man. CEV Lev 18:22 "Men, you must not have sexual relations with another man as with a woman. That is a terrible sin! ERV Lev 18:22 Never have sexual intercourse with a man as with a woman. It is disgusting. GW. So we see that even our modern versions oppose homosexuality and call it disgusting and a sin. The underlying Hebrew word means abomination. And just to observe in passing that that sin is bracketed on either side by a warning against killing your children and bestiality *Lev 18:23 Never have sexual intercourse with any*

animal and become unclean with it. A woman must never offer herself to an animal for sexual intercourse. It is unnatural. There if ever there was is a bag of sins. Lev 20:13 If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

As we cast our gaze over the Church of Pergamos we see this warning. *Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam.* Jesus refers us (yes it is Jesus talking to us) back to the OT where the wicked old prophet, once rebuked by his donkey, “**taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.**” *Num 25:1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.* In other words, this Church of Pergamos had problems with morality, sexuality and idolatry. It is similar to so many others today and I will ask your patience as I make a roll call of those who support immorality.

Just like the so called Church of England (currently maintains (according to the statement Issues in Human Sexuality) that same-sex partnerships are acceptable for laypersons but gay clergy are expected to be abstinent), they refused to deal with the individuals in their congregation that held these doctrinal views. They are just the tip of an iceberg. Many reformed Churches in Europe do not view monogamous same sex relationships as sinful or immoral. These include all German Lutheran, reformed and united Churches in EKD (Evangelical Church Germany), all Swiss reformed Churches in Swiss Reformed Church, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the United Protestant Church in Belgium, the Danish National Church, the Church of Sweden, the Church of Iceland, the Church of Norway, the France Reformed Church and the Waldensian Evangelical Church in Italy. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran Church body in the United States, as of 21 August 2009, voted 559 to 451 in favour of allowing non-celibate gays to become ordained ministers.

The largest Mennonite denomination in North America is the Mennonite Church USA. The Mennonite Church USA has many "Welcoming Congregations" which are Churches who are welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transvestite Queer) people in all levels of Church life. The United Church of Canada, the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, affirms that gay and lesbian persons are welcome in the Church and the ministry. The United Reformed Church (URC) has taken what is being described as a "historic step" by allowing same-sex civil partnerships on its premises. The resolution was reached (2012) at the General Assembly in Scarborough and will affect all United Reform Churches across England and Wales. While the decision is not binding and separate parishes will have the choice of whether to bless civil partnerships or not, it is expected that many will welcome the news.

The Uniting Church in Australia allows for the membership and ordination of gay and lesbian people. The Church of Scotland also welcomes homosexuals into membership. People who are homosexual by orientation are not barred by their orientation from membership of the Church or from taking up leadership roles in the Church, including the ministry of Word and Sacrament, the diaconate and eldership. Quakers have campaigned in favour of same-sex marriage and will allow ceremonies to take place on their premises.

Although not an organisation I regard as orthodox, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints makes clear that same-gender attraction is not sinful and no one should be blamed for it, but claims that a few people have been able to change their sexual orientation.

I just wanted to point out how widespread this doctrine of sexual sin is now. Before God we condemn it as sinful and say boldly “Thus says the Lord”, you have no place in the Kingdom. *1Co 6:9 Don't you know that wicked people won't inherit the kingdom of God? Stop deceiving yourselves! People who continue to commit sexual sins, who worship false gods, those who commit adultery, homosexuals, 1Co 6:10 or thieves, those who are greedy or drunk, who use abusive language, or who rob people will not inherit the kingdom of God.* GW.

What was being experienced in Pergamos was no different to what is being widely accepted as a teaching among many denominations today. To these denominations we ask, why are you not following the clear word of God? Why do you hold the doctrine of Balaam in the 21st century? Why are you Churches not rooting this out? However, this laissez-faire attitude to sexuality extends to the “hetro” community as well. As we shall show later, the morality of so called Christian Churches differs little from the world’s.

According to a Church survey in Australia, young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 who identify themselves as evangelicals are almost as sexually active as their non-Christian peers, according to the article “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It.”³ The article, which carries analysis of a study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in December 2009, notes that of the unmarried non-Christian adults surveyed, 88 percent said they have had sex – only slightly higher than evangelicals. Of those 80 percent of Christians who said they have had sex before marriage, 64 percent have done so within the last year and 42 percent are in a current sexual relationship. What’s perhaps even more disturbing, is that 65 percent of the women obtaining abortions identify themselves as either Protestant (37 percent) or Catholic (28 percent). “That’s 650,000 abortions obtained by Christians every year.”

According to a 2006 article by Ron Sider (author of “Rich Christians in an age of hunger”) In the 1990’s, the number of unmarried couples living together jumped a lot more in the Bible Belt where evangelicals constitute a large portion of the population than it did in the rest of the USA, over 100% versus 72% in the rest of the country. Evangelical youth are only 10% less likely to engage in premarital sex than non-evangelicals. Since 1993, 2.4 million young people have gone through a program called True Love Waits. Only 12 percent kept their pledge to wait until marriage for sex. The rates for sexually transmitted diseases is the same for those who made the pledge as for those who did not. The rate of cohabitation among born-again folk is 25 percent versus 33 percent for the general population. Fully 26 percent of traditional evangelicals do not think premarital sex is wrong, and 13 percent do not think adultery is wrong. Among non-traditional evangelicals, 46 percent say premarital sex is morally OK, 19 percent think adultery is morally acceptable.

That puts Pergamos in perspective. Before everyone starts congratulating themselves that we are not like that today, the answer is probably, no we are not. **We are far worse.** Fundamentally, it

³ <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/relationships/almost-everyones-doing-it>

comes back to the fact that these people have rejected the Word of God in favour of another teaching. It is a stumbling block as Jesus said. Of course, once you reject one part of God's word, its easier to reject another part and so on it goes. I do not think that we should view this false doctrine amongst the Pergamos Church as the only one that they had to bother about. I have no doubt you would find more but it is one that can start the destruction of the Churches.

Remember Solomon? The comment in this Church is that our opinion of him had gone down. It had gone down just like Solomon's brain appeared to have dropped into his trousers. He was thinking with his loins. Once you get rid of doctrine you are without a moral compass. As Rod Rosenblatt said "there just isn't enough substantial theology in most "mainline" Protestant Churches to upset anybody. There isn't much of anything left in mainline Protestant sermons or curricula – except maybe lessons in ethics, and perhaps new opportunities for social service.

As one wag put it, "The trouble with theology today is that there isn't any!"

Heaven is not LGBTQ

Part 35. Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

As we saw in last week's ministry, sexual sin is rife in the today's Churches and was a major issue in Pergamos. Specifically fornication which we start by defining. Pornos (πόρνος) is the original word. It comes from (πέρνημι) pernēmi to sell, specifically a (male) prostitute, a debauchee (libertine), fornicator, whoremonger. The word pornography is derived from the word fornication. *Mat 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.* Fornication is then one ground for divorce and covers any illicit sexual activity including homosexuality by definition.

Have you noticed that the Bible does not mention the issue of paedophilia. Yet for this self-righteous generation it has become a cardinal sin. You can have all sorts of sexual relationships that will not raise an eyebrow but mention paedophilia, the knives come out. It remains to be seen with such moral laxity why this should be the cause célèbre? Let me say that I do not accept sexual abuse of any kind and as we shall see, paedophilia, although not specifically mentioned is covered by other laws, for example fornication and rape. Just who decides at what age a person crosses the boundary from child to adult is also a religious issue. There is also the issue as to whether the Mosaic laws regarding these things are valid in the New Testament and needs to be proven.

We also must bear in mind that these sins have a spiritual analogue. The terms adultery and fornication are used in the context of apostasy. Israel is described thus *Eze 16:32 But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! Eze 16:33 They give gifts to all whores: but thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers, and hirest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom. And, Rev 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee,*

because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. Rev 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Rev 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. Why is this analogy given? I believe that it is because marriage is a symbol of our relationship with God. Unfaithfulness to Christ is a sin like adultery.

The marriage debate is a hot issue today.

Q. Is it Mr or Mrs Elton John?

A. It is a Civil Partnership.

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 gave same-sex couples the rights and responsibilities similar to those in a civil marriage. Civil partners are entitled to the same property rights, the same exemptions on inheritance tax, social security and pension benefits as married couples. They also have the same ability to get parental responsibility for a partner's children as well as reasonable maintenance, tenancy rights, insurance and next-of-kin rights in hospital and with doctors. There is a process similar to divorce for dissolving a civil partnership. Opposite-sex couples can opt for a religious or civil marriage ceremony, whereas a same-sex partnership is an exclusively civil procedure. Couples in civil partnerships will be able to convert their relationships into marriages if they wish - but they will be under no obligation to do so if they would rather retain their civil partnership.

Plans to legalise same-sex marriage have divided the Conservative Party, and more Tory MPs voted against the bill than voted for it. Prime Minister David Cameron (an arch religious compromiser) has said he believes same-sex marriages should be allowed in Churches - but only if there is a "100%" guarantee that no Church, synagogue or mosque would be forced to hold one against their wishes. Atheist Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg said the legislation was a triumph for his party, which has championed the plans. Most Labour MPs, including atheist Ed Miliband, also support the move.

I think that our rights as heterosexuals should be respected⁴. The gays want to be like other "married" couples, like me for example but I do not want to be like them or even associate with them. I regard what they do as filth and an abomination and it is our divine right to object. *1Co 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 1Co 5:10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is **called a brother** be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.* We do not accept the so called Christian gays in fellowship. There are no gays in heaven you may be relieved to hear.

⁴ We have the support of the UN declaration of Human Rights to express our religious beliefs.

Article 18. Everyone has **the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion**; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19. Everyone has **the right to freedom of opinion and expression**; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Well, we cannot in all fairness enter the marriage debate without defining marriage. We will also have to define other relationships as well to see if they fall in line with marriage and I make no apologies that my definitions will be taken from The Word of God not the word of men, especially the bankrupt politicians who lack a moral compass and if they did have one it would have been stolen. The **common law definition of marriage** is the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. The Latin *marītāre* means to provide with a husband or wife and *marītāri* meaning to get married, hence the origin of the word. However as you will find, the concept of marriage varies between cultures and differs in the scope of the relationship, for example, some cultures accept child marriage. So, if you are ever debating this subject of marriage, it is necessary to agree a definition at the start because you may be talking about different things but using a common word.

Let us firstly put ourselves in the position of Pergamos. They did not have Bibles yet, as we have them. It is unlikely that they had all the letters or even the gospels to direct them at this stage. They may have had a copy of Paul's letter to the Ephesians as it was geographically close. Access to the OT was possible and this may have been the prime source of doctrine. Jesus uses an OT example (Numbers 25) in His exhortation. *Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.* So, we shall proceed to develop our position from the OT. Let us also be careful to see them in the context of the revelation that they held at that time. We cannot apply the law of Moses or the teachings of the NT to their morals.

The first thing that we notice is how little the Bible actually says about marriage and how to get married. The process is not clearly defined. The first inklings of what marriage might be, come from Genesis and the Creation account. In Genesis (Chapter 2) the Creator makes a counterpart for Adam because it was not good that Adam be a "branch". Yes, that is one other meaning of the word "alone". Adam was a branch and from this branch the Creator cloned a counterpart, the woman Eve. *Gen 2:24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.* These words are probably Moses inspired commentary on this creative act since Adam did not have a father and mother in the ordinary sense of the words.

The word "wife" is introduced in v24 but I must point out that this same Hebrew word is rendered "woman" in v22 and v23. The statement is not a definition of marriage per se, rather it is the transition from living with parents to living with a woman. One might understand from this and the Creative act, that living with parents is not a good long term strategy. Being a "branch" all your life is not good. The Creator's plan was that a man is made complete by establishing a relationship with a woman. Note that God did not consider another male companion cut the mustard. It was a female only.

This relationship became procreative. *Gen 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.* Scientists have speculated on the evolutionary development of sexual reproduction. Asexual reproduction seems to work well enough. I believe that sexual reproduction underpins the Divine concept of marriage. Same sex couples cannot reproduce, cannot ever be fruitful and multiply.

Yet still we have no clear definition of the marriage process or what agreement and ceremony fixes it. What we have seen is that God makes a woman and gives her to Adam. No bells, wedding dresses, parties, vicars, bridesmaids, flowers, hymns, registry offices, signing a book etc. When we see people get together in Genesis, it is simple cohabitation *Gen 6:2 That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives (women) of all which they chose.* The word wife used in our day to define the married status of a woman did not exist in Genesis.

We notice also that relationships were established by the fathers. *Gen 24: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife (woman) unto my son Isaac.* Abraham also did not want a relationship with a Canaanite woman for his son. The relationship extends to cohabitation without ceremony. *Gen 24:67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

Polygamy was also acceptable in this society. *Gen 31:17 Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives (women) upon camels; Gen 16:3 And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.* Abraham also had a wife who was a concubine. *1Ch 1:32 Now the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine. Gen 25:1 Then again Abraham took a wife (woman), and her name was Keturah.*

Polygamy was acknowledged in law *Deu 21:15 If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Deu 21:16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn:* Polyandry, having more than one husband is not something we see in Scripture, with perhaps the exception of the Whore of Babylon. *Rev 18:9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning.*

The concept of marriage is clarified within the law of Moses and the National covenant. The concept of marital faithfulness is put into the spotlight with the 7th Commandment and is linked to the 10th Commandment. This does not mean that adultery did not exist before then but it is now codified in the law and Exodus 20 is its first use in scripture.

Doing the right thing

Part 36. *Rev 2:14* But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

The politicians will talk about doing “the right thing” but they do not define the what, how and why we should do the **right thing**. Of course they do not define it. It is a moral concept of expediency. For Adolph Hitler, the right thing was to create a racially pure state and weed out the biologically unsuitable which covered the Jews, Gypsies and those with mental health problems. Just bear this thought in mind when we come later to the subject of consanguinity. The SS (Schutzstaffel denoted

by the sig runes insignia) used a more stringent standard: In order to join, a candidate had to prove (presumably, through baptismal records) that all direct ancestors born since 1750 were not Jewish, or they would apply for a German Blood Certificate instead.

Later, when the requirements of the war made it impossible to confirm the ancestry of officer candidates, the proof of ancestry regulation was dropped to just the normal laws which made you trace back to your grandparents by certified evidence. Your grandchildren in the Nazi era were compulsorily classified as Jews and thus non-Aryans if at least three grandparents had been enrolled as members of a Jewish congregation. Hitler's grandfather was supposedly Jewish. Hitler had the Nazi law defining Jewishness written to exclude both Jesus Christ and himself. No doubt the Churches in Germany had to also alter scriptures naming Jesus King of the Jews. In the early 1930s, the Nazis promoted the so-called "German Christians", who attempted to subordinate the Church to the politics of the Nazi Party. This pro-Hitler sect of the Lutheran Church in Germany pronounced that Jesus had been a blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryan, fighting the Jews who eventually crucified Him. To Hitler, this was the **right thing**.

For Mao Zedong, the **right thing** was revolution. Maoism identifies peasant insurgencies in particular national contexts as part of a context of world revolution, in which Maoism views that the global countryside would overwhelm the global cities. For Gordon Gekko, the fictional character and the main antagonist of the 1987 film Wall Street "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures, the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A". You see, the "**right thing**" has different meanings for different people.

When it comes to the "**right thing**" in sexual relationships, that too, means different things to different people. As Christians we are obligated to find out God's word on the subject and stick to it. That is the baseline from which we work. It is not until we get the law of Moses that marriage gets some clear definitions. The concept of marriage is clarified within the law of Moses and the National covenant. The concept of marital faithfulness is put into the spotlight with the 7th Commandment and is linked to the 10th Commandment. This does not mean that adultery did not exist before then but it is now codified in the law and Exodus 20 is its first use in scripture. It is of note that Nationhood and the definition of marriage go together. Why? Because the type of nation you become will be defined by the fundamental unit of that nation, man and woman.

What did God declare to be the **right thing** in marriage? Permitted relationships are defined in the Bible by relationships to kin. Consanguinity is kinship characterized by the sharing of common ancestors (derived from the Latin consanguineous, meaning "of common blood"). Kin are of two basic kinds: consanguineous (sharing common ancestors) and affinal (related by marriage). Higher rates of mortality and rare diseases and disorders are more common in the offspring of consanguineous unions. While consanguineous marriages of various degrees have been practiced, all societies have incest taboos prohibiting marriage or sexual relations between certain kin. I have drawn up a chart based upon Leviticus chapter 18 to 21.

Such prohibited relationships of **consanguinity** included, among others, a man with his mother, sister, daughter, granddaughter and blood aunt, and of **affinity**, his step-mother, aunt by marriage, step-sister, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law or step-daughter.

Before the law of Moses, we saw Abraham's son Isaac married his first cousin, once removed, and his grandson Jacob married his first cousin. Abraham marries his half-sister Sarah, and twelve patriarchs, several of whom sprang from third generation consanguineous marriages, gave rise eventually to ten million people. The consanguineous marriages included Cain and Seth marrying their own sisters, Nahor marrying his niece Milcah, Lot marrying his own daughters to create the Moabites and Ammonites, and Amram marrying his aunt Jochebed.

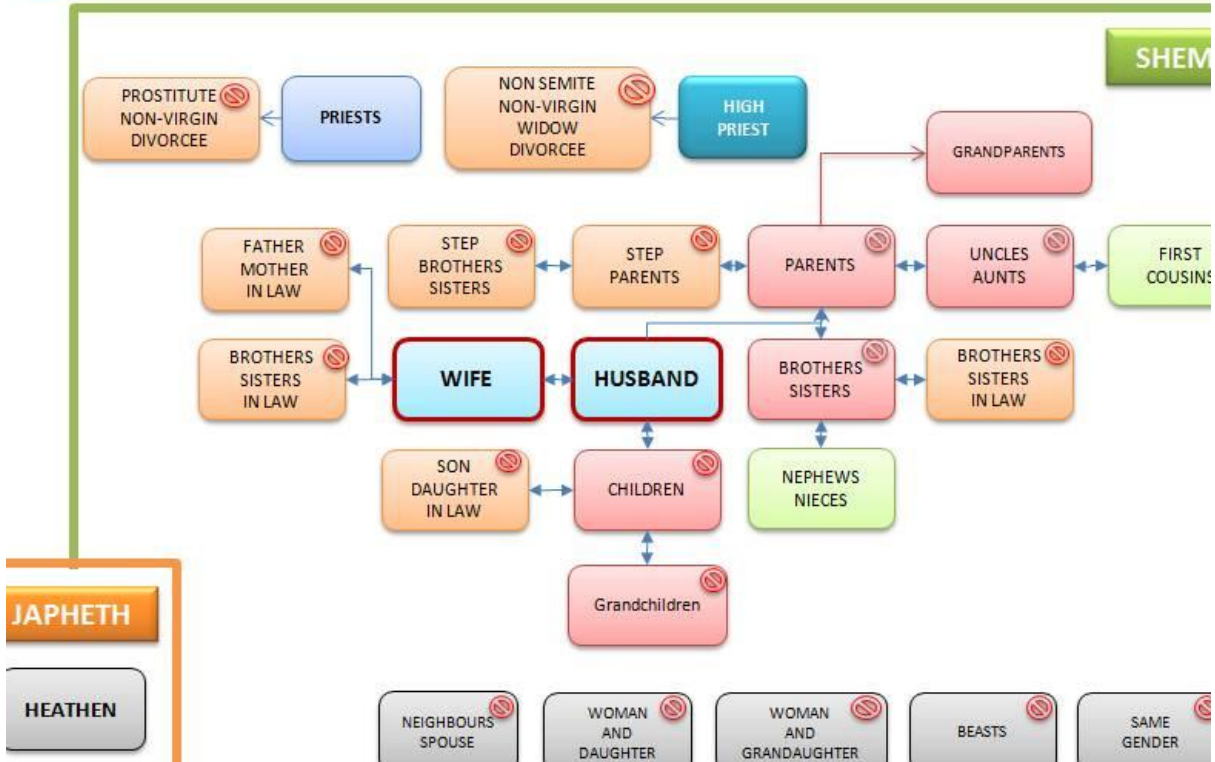
Did these Levitical laws of consanguinity arise from expediency due to the birth defects arising from near kinship relations? Charles Darwin, who was married to his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood, was one of the first experimentalists to demonstrate the adverse effects of inbreeding and to question the consequences of consanguineous mating. He documented the phenomenon of inbreeding depression for numerous plant species, and this caused him to worry about the health of his own children, who were often ill.

In our own day, British Pakistanis, half of whom marry a first cousin (a figure that is universally agreed), are 13 times more likely to produce children with genetic disorders than the general population, according to Government-sponsored research. One in ten children from these cousin marriages either dies in infancy or develops a serious life-threatening disability. While British Pakistanis account for three per cent of the births in this country, they are responsible for 33 per cent of the 15,000 to 20,000 children born each year with genetic defects. Everyone carries some abnormal genes, but most people don't have a defect because the normal gene overrules the abnormal one. One in ten children from these cousin marriages either dies in infancy or develops a serious life-threatening disability. But if a husband and wife both have an abnormal recessive gene, they have a one in four chance of producing a child with defects.

If as the geneticist John Sanford predicts, the human genome, the genetic blueprint is corrupting itself, then the problem is going to be much worse in the future. As you can find out, there are never any beneficial mutations (let me know if you find one and one that adds new information to the human genome) but there are literally thousands of damaging mutations. The process is a one way slide yet however disturbing this is, I do not think that the consequences of inbreeding is the basis of the laws of consanguinity. However, I do think that it will be an issue for future generations to tackle or at least in respect to having children. However, I don't think that breeding caused those laws.



PROHIBITED RELATIONSHIPS Consanguinity and Affinity



‘Till death us do part

Part 37. Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

This week we learned the Church of Scotland has sanctioned the operation of homosexual clergy and The House of Commons has officially voted to allow gay marriage in England and Wales, the first step in making the legislation official. With 366 “yea” votes and 161 “nay”-sayers. Prime Minister David Cameron has supported the bill from its inception and is “proud” with the outcome. The issue of marriage is therefore most relevant at this time in our history and whether we can find and adopt a Christian perspective.

The position of the Church of Scotland might have been good news to King James of the KJV fame or possibly now irreverently called the Gay JV. James's sexual orientation was so widely known that Sir

Walter Raleigh joked about it in public saying "King Elizabeth" had been succeeded by "Queen James." The KJV was the official version of the CoE and appointed to be read in Churches. As such it was the version to prop up the ecclesiology of the CoE. It has often disappointed me in terms of the clarity of its words. Compare these translations.

1Co 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 1Co 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. KJV.

*1Co 6:9 Knowe yee not that the vnrighteous shall not inherite the kingdome of God? Be not deceiued: neither fornicatours, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor wantons, **nor buggerers**, 1Co 6:10 Nor theeues, nor couetous, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners shall inherite the kingdome of God. Geneva Bible. That's the version James didn't like and yes that's a biblical term for men who lie with each other, they are buggers. Well the scripture makes that quite clear but marriage is in some ways less well defined and for a reason.*

What we see in scripture, from the creation, is a developing revelation of what marriage truly is. It is like a painting that starts off with a few shapes and outlines. A sketch, if you will. That sketch gets more detailed with time and eventually the colours and details are filled in and it becomes a clearer picture. Well you may say to me, that is very speculative, to which I answer, revelation does the same with Christ. Christ, as someone observed, "was latent in the OT and patent in the NT". That latency of Christ is especially seen in the Tabernacle and furnishings as well as the Theophanies. *1Co 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: **and that Rock was Christ. AND Gal 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.***

As the Divine mystery unfolds, we begin to see things like the clean and unclean animals in terms of the redemptive work of Christ which cleans all Nations. *Act 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. **AND Act 10:14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. Act 10:15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Act 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*** The animals taught a lesson about men.

We see the OT sacrifice revealed as Christ *Joh 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* That too is still a shadow of the final reality. We also see that the veil of the Temple is His flesh, torn that we may gain access to the Father *Luk 23:45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. **AND Heb 10:20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;***

I could go on but here just make this point. All scripture comes to its fullest sense when seen in the light of Christ and His eternal work. We shall see that marriage obtains its best and highest

definitions when Christ is revealed in the New Testament. Christ emerges from the mists of antiquity to take us with Him to eternity.

Now let us just remind ourselves. "When does the OT close?" The answer is at the crucifixion and hence, the gospels are for the most part Older Testament. Therefore, when Jesus comments on the relationship between men and women, He does so under the Law of Moses. To what extent people already understood the points that Jesus made is unclear. What we can say is that Jesus is not rewriting the Law of Moses and He is not adding to it. He is taking us to the core of its meaning.

One area that we have not examined is **Betrothal**. This means to promise "by one's truth." (Greek Μνάομαι mnaomai remember). Men and women were betrothed when they were engaged to be married. Deu 22:23 If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Deu 22:24 Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you. In law, betrothal was equivalent to being one flesh, hence Joseph's concern at Mary's pregnancy *Mat 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ occurred in this way. His mother Mary had been betrothed (μνηστεύω) to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found [to be pregnant] by the Holy Spirit. Mat 1:19 So Joseph her husband, being righteous and not wanting to disgrace her, intended to divorce her secretly. LEB.* The point we make here is that the word of two people to commit to each other forms the foundation of the relationship and that before sexual relations take place. No ceremonies are described for this act.

The Divine concept of marriage shows that **divorce was a concession to hard hearts** but that was not the purest form it was to be held in. *Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.* In other words because men lacked the Spirit of God and had hearts of stone, God conceded divorce as perhaps a lesser evil to the damage that might follow a relationship forced to continue. The case of the dislikeable woman makes the point. *Deu 24:1 "If a man chooses to enter into marriage with a woman, but she finds herself displeasing to him because he has found something objectionable about her, he must draw up divorce papers, hand them to her, and then send her out of his house. Deu 24:2 If she goes out from his house, becomes the wife of another man, Deu 24:3 and this second husband dislikes her, he, also, must draw up divorce papers, hand them to her, and then send her away from his house. Should the second husband die, Deu 24:4 her first husband who married her and divorced her earlier must not remarry her, because she was defiled, since this is detestable to the LORD. ISV.* We make a point here, namely that most couples do not enter a relationship with the idea that "This is the woman I want to divorce". It's a two way thing and illustrates a. The need to choose well to start with and b. Have a plan to resolve issues arising in marriage. Divorce is not God's preferred option.

Thoughts are as bad as deeds. *Mat 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* Adultery is not necessarily fulfilled in the physical act. In the eyes of the Almighty it is a mental attitude. *Mat 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

Mat 15:20 These are the things which defile a man. I guess this would make nearly every man an adulterer and yes, you would only have to do it once.

This shows how necessary it is to continue to draw at the fountain of forgiveness. *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* It also shows that Christ forgives our adultery. *Joh 8:10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? Joh 8:11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

This is a lesson to us about our self-righteousness and need to forgive others for we may not sin in the same way but we may commit the same sin. As Job noted *Job 31:1 I made an agreement with my eyes not to look at a young woman in a way that would make me want her.* ERV

Finally for today we note that **Marriage is not permanent.** Marriage is a temporal relationship. The Saducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, had a trick question for Jesus. Whose wife would a woman be if she married many times? *Luk 20:34 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: Luk 20:35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Luk 20:36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.*

It was a clever question but it failed to understand the nature of everlasting life. Marriage was designed for this life as a type or image of the life to come. Marriage is symbolic and the earthly relationships pass away so that the eternal relationship can be consummated. *Rev 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. Rev 19:8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*

The reason marriage exists for Christians is that it should be a religious experience for Christians to enable them to understand the deeper eternal relationship with Christ. It is preparatory. It is instructive. It is to teach us about a relationship that we will enjoy in eternity.

No Christ. No Marriage

Part 38. *Rev 2:14* But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Let's have a recap on what we have observed regarding marriage.

- It is a creation ordinance and the second law of scripture
- It is based on direct creation NOT evolution (Biblical marriage is a statement on Creation)
- Marriage was designed to help the individual... *Gen 2:18* And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.
- It is wife not wives

- It is for a male and female, not male and male or female and female
- Divorce was a concession to a hard heart
- Religious ceremonies were not required
- Betrothal or promise constitutes marriage
- There were consanguinal and affinal limits to relationships
- The death penalty was applied for certain infidelities (i.e. divorce)
- Infidelity of thought is as bad as deed.
- Sexual sins are an analogue for spiritual infidelity
- Marriage is temporary.

Before we leave the OT I want to make an observation on the first miracle of Jesus at Cana of Galilee. *Joh 2:1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: Joh 2:2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.* The word used is γάμος gamos and means marriage or wedding. We get the word gamete from this (in biology a mature haploid male or female germ cell).

We see that marriages are celebrated with a feast as a joyous occasion. *Mat 22:2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, Mat 22:3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Mat 22:4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.* The word for marriage is also used of a feast without marriage *Est 9:22 As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of **feasting** and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.*

Now we move to examine the NT statements (post crucifixion) on marriage. Firstly we see that Paul restates the validity of consanguinity. **Are consanguinity laws still valid?** *1Co 5:1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife..... 1Co 5:5 To deliver such an one unto satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. **The answer then is yes in the Church. 1Co 5:13 But them that are without **God judgeth.*****

What about homosexuality? *1Co 6:9 Knowe yee not that the vnrighteous shall not inherite the kingdome of God? Be not deceiued: neither fornicatours, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor wantons, nor buggerers, (Geneva). **Again the answer is yes. Homosexuality** is the judicial manifestation of the rejection of the true image of God. One perversion leads to another perversion. *Rom 1:23 For they turned the glorie of the incorruptible God to the similitude of the image of a corruptible man, and of birdes, and foure footed beastes, and of creeping things Rom 1:26 For this cause God gaue them vp vnto vile affections: for euen their women did change the naturall vse into that which is against nature.....Rom 1:27 And likewise also the men left the naturall vse of the woman, and burned in their lust one toward another, and man with man wrought filthinesse, and receiued in themselues such recompence of their errour, as was meete. Geneva.**

Homosexuality in our society a **symptom** of a Godless society, not the cause of it. Our godlessness has created homosexuality. Yet how should we as Christians view this and respond to it? Here again we see a change in the nature of the approach. *1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.* The death penalty was valid in the Church-State which was Israel. Now the Kingdom is no longer of this world. *Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

The Church does not have the authority to exercise capital punishment or any corporal punishment. Instead of the death penalty, there is the deliverance to satan and shunning or breaking fellowship with the offender. In this act you can see how the Church lost its way from its early simplicity. From the time of Constantine the earthly State and Church of the Kingdom of heaven were one and the same Holy Catholic Church. I mentioned last time King Henry 8th, following his excommunication from Rome (1533) merged Civil law with Church law as he established the Church of England. Church laws which didn't carry death penalties but were now under Civil law did. It was a clever way of putting everyone under the rule of the State Church with Henry as the head of the Church.

Before that, as we saw, you got a better deal if you could get justice in a Church court where the penalties were less severe. To do this you had to be smart enough to recite the "neck verse" Psalm 51. *Psa 51:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Psa 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.* I doubt today that many Christians could even quote it!

If you were unlearned and couldn't read, you didn't survive. So what should we say of what is going on today where the laws of marriage are being changed. Should we care? In one sense NO because State marriage is not founded in God's word. The State rejects the Biblical approach and so when it talks of marriage it is not talking about the same thing. You cannot pick and mix the scripture since adding and subtracting from it incurs the plagues of God.

The State has no right to prescribe laws for the Church which overrule the laws of God. The Church by the same token is not involved in the writing of the state laws (it could in some circumstance be asked). It is not the mission of the Church to save the world by laws however good. Its role is to deliver men from sin. *Gal 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:* The idea that the Church should use politics as a form of creeping evangelism or world domination is alien to the gospel. Let me try and illustrate this distinction from history. Firstly in the OT. God chose Israel to be His peculiar people and in doing so invoked a covenant. This was a solemn and binding agreement. *Exo 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:* It was not open to everybody and the laws were for those who bound themselves to the covenant. Male circumcision was a token then but now in the NT both men and women show their clean conscience through baptism.

Israel was similar to the Church in that it was an independent kingdom and a Theocracy. *Exo 34:27 And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. Exo 34:28 And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.* Those outside of this covenant had no relationship with God. That was true then and it is true today in the Church.

This **national** covenant of law (Moses) has now been superseded by a NEW covenant with Christ *Heb 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.* Therefore those who come into the Church or kingdom of God must enter the covenant with Christ. This carries its own requirements for membership *Joh 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.* It is a marriage with house rules. You do not pick and chose what bits you like and what you don't like because it's a package. Civil society (the State) cannot be part of the Church unless it enters the covenant on an individual basis (person by person).

While the State may impose laws that society, including Christians, should obey, *Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil..... For he is the minister of God to thee for good.* If the rulers impose evil laws, then they are no longer a minister of God for good and we should not follow them because they will be compromising our beliefs. Herein is the problem today. The problem of a mixed society. Yet since marriage is something defined within the Christian covenant with Christ (marriage is Christ and the Church). *Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.* What goes on outside of the Church is **NOT Christian marriage**.

Unbelievers can steal words from the Bible and think they are using the same terms of reference but that is a lie. Male and male cannot represent Christ and the Church. God does not accept homosexuals in His kingdom and He certainly does not endorse them as a model of the relationship with Himself. It is an abomination. Christian should perhaps begin to use a new word to describe their marriage relationship? "Joined in Christ" might serve as it also emphasises that an unequal yoke is unacceptable. Let's think of some alternatives.

In closing, I want to make this point. **There is no hierarchy of sin.** Scripture does not put homosexuality above covetousness, fornication above murder. All the sins are the same *Jas 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* Yes, it requires 100 per cent pass rate. That is a lesson to all Christians that when we judge people as worthless because of their sin, we judge ourselves. We are **NOT** to tolerate sin in the Church but we are to embrace the sinners (NOT their sin and abomination) outside of the Church. This is a fine line because it may seem that we are more tolerant of the unbeliever in his sin than the believer. Yes, I suppose we are because we should know better and behave better. The sinner is already on the path to damnation, the sinning Christian is damaging the pathway to glory, how will the sinner then find it?

The Grand design of Marriage

Part 39. *Rev 2:14* But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

We come to the close in our current study on marriage. This week Nigeria's parliament has passed a bill criminalizing gay marriage, making it punishable with a 14-year prison term included in the bill are sections that make it unlawful to register gay associations and make public show of same-sex relationships indirectly or directly. This section attracts 10-year jail term. This is a contrast to the UK position and will no doubt cause rejoicing among Christian groups. Yet as we saw last time, the Church does not punish with physical sanctions.

You might dread to think what punishments would be dreamed up by some Churches if they could run the judicial system. The New England puritans, running from persecution in Europe, set up their own persecutions. H. L. Mencken's famous remark that a Puritan is one who suspects "somewhere someone is having a good time" may have some truth in it. So the New Englanders made civil laws to punish heresy, mis-spending of time (Church police must have been like the Islamic beard patrols), capital punishment for blasphemy, idolatry, witchcraft, bestiality, cursing father or mother. There were fines or whipping for Sabbath breaking. Adulterers were to wear the letters AD cut in their cloth or be whipped, Robbers branded in the hand with R and Burglars with the letter B.

Yes, it was pretty close to a modern Islamic state with Shariah law but it is far from New Testament Christianity. Some Christians, like those disciples of old would punish the Samaritans who would not receive Jesus, *Luk 9:54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, **Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.** For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.* Christians need to know "What manner of spirit they are".

As Clarke observes on these verses, "Ye do not consider that the present is a dispensation of infinite mercy and love; and that the design of God is not to destroy sinners, but to give them space to repent, that He may save them unto eternal life. And ye do not consider that the zeal which you feel springs from an evil principle, being more concerned for your own honour than for the honour of God. The disciples of that Christ who died for his enemies should never think of avenging themselves on their persecutors". As Christians, we need to lift our gaze higher and beyond this evil world.

Christian Marriage is a symbol of the Church/Christ relationship. Marriage as a term used by the world does **not** conform to this idea. The world uses the term as a civil arrangement between two people of either gender. It has nothing to do with Christ. Christian marriage does. *Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be **joined** unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*

The Church takes its model from the good wife. *Eph 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to*

himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Sadly there are many Christians whose marriages are a sad caricature of this

The marriage relationship is one where God given roles are accepted and performed. The Church/wife has her duties and Christ/husband has His. It is a redemptive relationship. It is a saving, washing, caring and sanctifying love, a mutually shared religious relationship. It involves self-sacrifice and the submission to that sacrifice of Christ. It is the giving of self to the other not satisfying self. It is a marriage of "HELPS" meet for each other. So every Christian should be working this in their marriage and every Church in its relationship with Jesus.

Children are not mentioned since marriage is primarily about husband and wife, which leads me to the next topic. **Consanguinity is a lesson** in the relationship between Christ and His Church. It is a lesson in loyalty. Have you ever considered what things draw you most away from obedience to Christ? What things test that loyalty the most? I am going to suggest that it is close family. We do not get overly concerned for what happens in the lives of those more distant from us, even in families. Yet those close to us, especially children, parents and siblings can become of great concern.

Take children for instance. Parents are exceptionally liberal with their own children and far less so with other people's children. They make all manner of excuse and allowance for bad behaviour in their own offspring. I have seen Christian parents excuse their offspring from all manner of bad conduct, rather than confront it with the scripture. They would rather skirt around the issue than confront it and risk the potential aggravation that might arise. Hence parents will uphold the equal yoke as a Church principal but when their professing children shack up with unbelievers they let it pass. Parents often seem quite incapable of taking a stand with their offspring that they would take with another believer. I am also quite surprised how many Christian parents keep relationships with their fornicating offspring and keep sponsoring them.

Parents fail to see, that by giving in to their children, they have put their children above Christ. They have made that child an idol, a venerated object that is the focus of their lives and Christ is relegated to a second place. How was Abraham even able to think about offering up his only son? It was because God was his reward. *Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and **thy exceeding great reward.***

If we put anyone above Him, then we are nothing but adulterers of the faith. *Luk 14:26 If any man come to me (JESUS), and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.* There will be parents that will live to regret the false freedoms that they lovingly gave their children, instead of instilling the values of Christ in their lives. They gave them destructive choices and children will take those bad choices, because of their nature, so it is critical to bring them to Christ.

I recall some years ago, a young man being spoken to about his personal faith in Christ. He was very uncomfortable about it and possibly under some conviction, he began to be tearful. His mother intervened angrily and took him out of the conversation. Now that woman was a regular Church goer, whose husband was a deacon in a Baptist Church. He was always going on about the

“reformed faith” but when it came to getting his offspring into a good CoE school he would roll his faith up and go to that Church for the duration. Well, I do not know what became of those boys that they sheltered from the gospel of Christ but I can tell you their parents eventually divorced. Compromise and adultery were at the core of their lives and eventually it fully outworked itself. They also put their children on a pedestal above the demands of Christ.

This then is the definition of commitment. It is not an hour on Sunday where we revive the feel good factor, the odd prayer of desperation when we have needs, or the occasional reading of scripture. It is the total commitment of all that we have to the cause of Christ *Luk 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.* Jesus is not telling us to neglect responsibilities but that all those things must be given from me, to Him. They must come under His Dominion. As the martyred missionary Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose” and another missionary C T Studd confirmed, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.” Also remember General Booth, who when asked for the secret of his success said: “I will tell you the secret. God has had all there was of me”.

The closer we would be to God the more exclusive must be our lives and that I suggest is the lesson of consanguinity. A man must not allow anyone closer than his wife. *Mat 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter **more than me is not worthy of me.***

And that leads me on to another consideration regarding marriage, namely what I call, **Paul's singleton**. In first Corinthians, Paul is responding to an information request. *1Co 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.* We can imagine that he was asked something like, “should Christians get married?” Then he makes this interesting comment, “**But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment**”. *For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*

Paul of course is suggesting that celibacy is a better option than marriage. Paul is **not commanded** by the Spirit of God to say this, so should we ignore it or, is it something we might aspire to but not take a legalistic stand upon? I have thought about this and here are my thoughts. Corinth was a lively Church, gifted but immature and one beset with problems. It was learning to grow up from being babies to men (1 Cor 3 v 2). I imagine that Paul prayed hard and often for them. I cannot say that I am the best role model for the Saints but there are times that I am deeply frustrated by the lack of maturity in people who say they have been Christians for years. They just do not want to grow up and their commitment seems distant rather than a love affair with Christ. It's a sort of Facebook faith. A display of personal experiences and occasional notes about religion.

I wondered whether Paul talked with the Lord on this subject? Perhaps, as he was preparing this letter, he conversed with God and said, "Wouldn't it be better if people did not have the distractions of life? Would they not sever you better?" "Can I suggest that we tell the Corinthians that they will have a more fulfilled relationship with You if they are single?" To which the Lord answers him, "Yes, I will permit you to suggest that with appropriate caveats". So Paul does and later in the letter (for there are no chapters and verses) says, *1Co 7:32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.*

This is merely anticipating our heavenly relationship with our Saviour. *1Co 7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.*

Christian marriage should then teach us about our relationship with our Creator Redeemer. The most important relationship in the Universe. It should be mirrored in the Church and outworked in the home. To this end, I make a final comment. Whatever you want to call your relationship and you may call it a partnership or marriage, it does not come anywhere near that which the Bible speaks of unless there is the acceptance of the Creator and the creation. I am suggesting that it is not a marriage for those who hold to evolution rather than creation, because marriage came out of creation. **You cannot be married unless you acknowledge the CREATOR.**

Mat 19:5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Mat 19:6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. We are taught that God made a man out of dust, fashioned or cloned as we say today, a woman from the bones of the man (because females did not exist before this) and brought them together under His Divine shadow. If this is all myth and magic, so then is marriage.

Historically, the wedding ring was rather connected to the exchange of valuables at the moment of the wedding rather than a symbol of eternal love and devotion. This is reflected in the prayer book statement, "WITH this Ring I thee wed, with my Body I thee worship, and with all my worldly Goods I thee endow:" Like much of the rubric handed down it has nothing to do with Christianity. Our Puritan forefathers said of the Prayer Book that it was "an unperfect book, culled and picked out of that Popish dunghill". Just as it is equally without foundation that any man or any government can pronounce on marriage.

Let us close this study with that thought. There is a "marriage" which is defined by God, bounded by His eternal laws, bringing those who participate in it into a relationship with His Son our Lord Jesus Christ. It is joined together by the Creator Himself *Mat 19:6 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.* In this statement we see that no man, no state, no government **can join** two people together and equally no man, no state, no government can separate two people. This statement leaves the current marriage debate dead in the water. Whatever men in their arrogance plan to do with marriage, it has nothing whatever to do with God's design on marriage.

Trojans and the Church

Part 40. Rev 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where **Satan's seat is:** and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where **Satan dwelleth.**

It may seem somewhat strange that the Pergamos Church, that "holds fast" the name of Christ, can have teachers of false doctrine living among them? No matter how much we would like to think that we are somehow "right" in what we believe and practice, we must acknowledge that we are a work in progress. The local Church is a bit like a bus with people getting on and off at different points along the journey. It may have at one time quite a lot of young people on board or at others old people. In terms of the age distribution of attendance, it will vary over time. Along with that will be the variation in the level of knowledge and understanding.

You can see then that the word "Church" does not describe what you might find inside. The 7 Churches of the Apocalypse are all addressed commonly as "Churches" but they are all vastly different. They have a common faith but are in different societal environments, are under different pressures and have a variety of practices going on. These practices may be unique and arising from the influences of when and where we live. Some practices adopted by Christian groups are sinister.

In the latter part of the '70s and early '80s, (David Berg aka Moses David, children of God/Family cult) responding in **part to the sexual liberality of that time period**, presented the possibility of trying out a more personal and intimate form of witnessing which became known as 'Flirty Fishing' or 'FFing'. In his Letters at that time, he offered the challenging proposal that since 'God is Love' (1 John 4:8), and His Son, Jesus, is the physical manifestation and embodiment of God's Love for humanity, then we as Christian recipients of that Love, are in turn responsible to be living samples to others of God's great all-encompassing Love. Taking the Apostle Paul's writings literally, that saved Christians are 'dead to the Law [of Moses]' (Romans 7:4), through faith in Jesus, [Berg] arrived at the rather shocking conclusion that Christians were therefore free through God's grace to go to great lengths to show the Love of God to others, even as far as meeting their sexual needs.

David Berg incorporated the culture of the time to his method of evangelism. It was a synthesis. I imagine the same thing happened in Pergamos where they adopted cultural practices into the Church. Pergamos the city, was in league with the devil who had his throne there. Stop thinking that satan has a kingdom in Hell. The kingdom of satan is here in this world and you can see his murderous works that prove it. *Joh 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.* This Church is trying to hold the frontline of faith in a society that is trying to lead them in another direction. **"thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith"**. Yet they still picked up false teaching.

Satan takes many forms to deceive and here in Pergamos there was an altar to Zeus. Zeus was the head of the Pantheon, all gods, the supreme god. And one of the wonders of the world, this magnificent altar to Zeus, the largest most famous altar in the world was there. It was shaped like a huge throne and it was set on the Acropolis. The sights of Pergamos became routine for the Church

and perhaps innocuous as they settled in their consciousness. Familiarity dulled their awareness of the clear and present dangers. This is the point at which they start to enter the fabric of the Church and the seeds of false doctrine and practice spring up. **Why are we misled?**

Take the Alpha course. I think that it's a Trojan horse. You know the story of how the Greeks besieged Troy for 10 years and failed to break through the walls. Odysseus had an idea to build a huge wooden horse with his soldiers concealed inside. They left it outside the gate as a parting gift and the main army left. The delighted Trojans pulled the gift inside and that night the Greek soldiers dropped down out of it and took the city. The lesson is that what seems a good idea on the outside might have serious and untold consequences.

The Alpha program has achieved ecumenical acceptance (includes Catholics) because it is doctrinally weak. It looks fairly orthodox and yet it refers to salvation, the cross, the death of Christ, etc., in such a general way that false doctrine is not refuted. It says salvation is by grace, for instance, but it does not say that salvation is by grace ALONE by faith ALONE through the blood of Christ ALONE without works or sacraments (that would put off the Catholics). It refers to the Bible as God's Word in a general sense, but it does not explain that the Bible is truly God's inerrant, infallible, supernatural Word that must be revered and obeyed in every detail, that the Bible ALONE is the authority for faith and practice. It refers to Christ's death on the cross, but does not plainly explain the vicarious atonement that was required for man's salvation. It refers to man's need, but it does not describe man as a totally depraved natural born sinner.

I am not suggesting for a moment that those people who set up the Alpha course, or those who conduct it are doing so from evil motives. There are many good people involved. Preaching the gospel is a good work. What I do say is that they are proceeding in a different direction to the NT way, both in the approach and substance of their gospel. It is a compromised gospel.

A word continually associated with the Alpha course is "non-threatening". The environment must be non-threatening, so that would rule out many encounters in the NT. Like for instance the young ruler, *Mat 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Not exactly a gentle introduction to the faith.

I cannot imagine Paul sitting around with the Church and saying "we are not doing too well evangelising at the moment, let's try a new method, we'll invite them all in for dinner and a chat and discuss our faith". I didn't see Paul on Mars hill looking to discuss his faith in a non-threatening environment. *Act 17:23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.* Paul is invited to speak and speak he does. Uncompromising and dogmatic. Christianity is not a discussion, it's a declaration. Why would we discuss something that is written in the blood of Christ? This message stands without explanation. *1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried,*

and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. I can explain what it means but I am not going to discuss it with you, because I know that if you are not in Christ as an unbeliever you regard the things of God as foolishness. *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Jesus spoke in parables to confound not explain. *Mat 13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*

I cannot see Jesus saying to the disciples, “we are not getting on too well with the Pharisees these days, let’s try and be a little less threatening, perhaps we should start a focus group to discuss our differences or to find some common ground?” Christianity is not about a meeting of equals. Christianity is not a consensus of opinion derived from a focus group. Its not a discussion. its the dogmatic display of Christ *1Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* NOT the foolishness of discussion. Perhaps the real problem with our day is that there are far too few preachers and teachers.

The idea is not to lull people in to a sense of religious security under false pretensions, neither should the unbeliever think that they have a place in the Church until they are saved. *1Co 14:23 If therefore the whole Church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? Evangelism takes place outside of the Church not in it. If you allow unbelievers to come in, they will compromise you. Just remember that antichrist arises from the Church not the world 1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

Now the point that I am making is this. Churches may hold fast to Christ and the Faith but get lost in the details and through this tolerate some strange ideas. “*thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam,also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans*”. The teachings enter because we fail to understand what the Bible teaches. We rely on denominational creeds, what men say in pulpits and in devotional literature. When it comes down to asking what the Bible teaches on a particular subject we make little effort. That leaves gaps in our knowledge that the devil can exploit. People get hung up on the teaching of men, like Calvin and Luther, both flawed individuals, rather than the teaching of Christ. We spend our days arguing about the religious positions that men set up, rather than finding for ourselves what God taught. We can even be so overawed with man’s teaching, we may fail to have the courage to test it on the altar of faith.

I have told you that many years ago, I met a dear old Christian doing his daily Bible reading. I asked him a question on the passage and he could not answer it. The reason you see is, that he wasn’t studying his Bible he was just reading it. I am not saying you shouldn’t read your Bibles but you should ask questions about the meaning of what you read. If you cannot answer them seek knowledge from those who can. *Act 8:30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except*

some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. That is why God gave teachers to the Church.

The bad wife

Part 41. Rev 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

We turn now to consider what happens if Churches disobey the Saviour. I do not think that I have ever come across a Church that was not complacent in its consideration that it was on perfect terms with Christ. The casual confessions of indwelling personal sin do not generally translate into a general reformation in practice. The question “Are we really a Church fit for Christ” is taken for granted. It is clear from the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation that this is not so.

You recall that we discussed how the NT writings are not in the order in which they were written. In our versions they are stacked (with the exception of Revelation) by size. This is unfortunate since it disguises how the Church developed and why these letters were written at the time they were. The epistle of Peter is written some 40 years after the crucifixion and is one of the last epistles to be written before John’s letters and the Apocalypse. It is a focus on the times and shows how quickly the gospel was to be corrupted and error entered the Churches. It is possible that Pergamos had read Peter’s letter and had been warned already. They did not all heed it.

*1Pe 1:1 From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. To God's chosen people who are temporary residents in the world and are scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, **Asia**, and Bithynia.*

Pergamos and Churches like it had been warned. The devils method was to infiltrate the Church and divisively undermine the Gospel. I do not believe this method has ever changed over the last 2000 years. By the time the letters to the seven Churches are written, this is happening, error is becoming accepted. Satan as we saw was living with and beside some of the Churches as in Pergamos, Smyrna, Thyatira and Philadelphia. Peter warned the saints of the sins of Balaam just as Christ now confronts them in Pergamos. Peter’s letter had largely gone unnoticed. We might ask does it still go unnoticed? **Read 2 Peter 2.**

2Pe 2:14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: 2Pe 2:15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

You may recall that in the OT, God did not drive out all of the enemies of Israel in Canaan. *Jdg 2:21 I also will NOT henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: Jdg 2:22 That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. Jdg 2:23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.* I believe that

Christ does not deliver the Church on earth from all of its enemies so that it should not become complacent. We are in a war zone and that, we should realise is good for our souls. It builds strength and Christian character.

Over the Church, Christ hangs a sword. *Rev 2:12 And to the angel of the Church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; Do we, I wonder, see this sword? Have you heard of the "Sword of Damocles"? Dionysius was a fourth century B.C. tyrant of Syracuse, a city in Magna Graecia, the Greek area of southern Italy. To all appearances Dionysius was very rich and comfortable, with all the luxuries money could buy, tasteful clothing and jewelry, and delectable food. He even had court flatterers (adventurers) to inflate his ego. One of these ingrates was the court sycophant, Damocles. Damocles used to make comments to the king about his wealth and luxurious life. One day when Damocles complimented the tyrant on his abundance and power, Dionysius turned to Damocles and said, "If you think I'm so lucky, how would you like to try out my life?"*

Damocles readily agreed, and so Dionysius ordered everything to be prepared for Damocles to experience what life as King Dionysius was like. Damocles was enjoying himself immensely... until he noticed a sharp sword hovering over his head, which was suspended from the ceiling by a horse hair. This, the tyrant explained to Damocles, was what life as ruler was really like. Damocles, alarmed, quickly revised his idea of what made up a good life, and asked to be excused. He then eagerly returned to his poorer, but safer life. The Sword of Damocles, is used to describe a sense of foreboding and might translate into English idiom as "walk a mile in my shoes."

I don't think that we as Christians appreciate the responsibility that comes with the calling. If we could walk a mile in Christ's shoes we might better understand what life is truly about. It can get to a point where that sword will fall on us if we do not accept our responsibilities. *Mat 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. Mat 10:35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. Mat 10:36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*

The Church is not primarily a welfare organisation, although you might think so from the way it lives in the world. Yes we are to do good, *Gal 6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* It is not however the prime directive. That is the gospel. *Mar 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* As Peter warned, that Gospel will be compromised and valueless if we do not defend it. *2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.*

Heresies or divisions should not be feared. *1Co 11:18 For first of all, when ye come together in the Church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 1Co 11:19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.* Divisions are a God given way of winnowing and highlighting teaching in the Church. The idea that we can all hold equally valid conflicting views of Christ's teaching is wrong. It is this view that downgrades Christ's teaching and opens the floodgates to error, which leads us to the focus of our text today.

Rev 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

It raises a number of questions. To whom does this happen? How does this happen? Where has Christ done this in history? Does it happen today? How is repentance shown?

To whom does this happen? From the text, we can see that it is both the Church “thee” and “them”. Christ tackles both the Church and those in it that cause error. I do not believe that this is saying to the Church, “I will now have to do it because you are not doing it”. The Church is not exempt from the consequences of its toleration of error. An early example of error entering the Church occurs in Galatia. This is recorded in Paul’s letter to that Church *Gal 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.*

Galatians is reckoned to be the first of the letters written in the NT (48AD). If we had the NT books in order, it would be the first book of the NT. Some 15 years after the crucifixion, error reared its head. Two Apostles were head to head in a controversy. It shows us to some extent the divisive nature of God’s word. *Heb 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* This potential division between Jews and Gentiles was dealt with firmly and lovingly.

It is indeed strange to think that Peter could have fallen foul of this error, especially since he had been given a unique revelation of the unity of Jew and Gentile. *Act 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.* That is a lesson to us as to how easy it is to lose sight of God’s direction in the face of peer group pressure. Even Apostles were not exempt practical error.

This of course raises the question as to how can we accept the infallibility of scripture when the writers were prone to error in their daily lives? How did the Spirit of God allow them to fall into this? I can only suggest that when directing the Church under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they were infallible. *2Pe 1:21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* The conflicts in their daily lives served as a means of opening up new areas of the faith that required focus and correction and a reminder we are human.

It clearly takes strong men to resist the tide of change and Paul was just one such man in the history of many godly men who have stood firmly for the faith. *Php 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.* It is clear that Paul was not about to be swayed by popular feeling from his goal of winning Christ. The prize was too valuable. Caleb was another hero of the faith, *Jos 14:14 Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel.*

DV we shall begin to see how Christ uses the sword *Rev 2:12 And to the angel of the Church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.*

The Sword of The LORD

Part 42. Rev 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

This warning comes to Churches who refuse to exercise discipline and maintain sound teaching. These Churches have made themselves the arbiter of what the Church should and should not teach, instead of Christ. The solution Christ gives them is **not** to find another Church that suits them better or to move the Church to a quieter location. It is that we have to deal with the issues. We have to face the demons. The alternative is that we will face Christ.

How does this happen and where has Christ done this in history? To answer this, I want to take us back to an event that happened in the England nearly 600 years ago. There are many other examples we could find but this is particularly interesting, since it marked the start of a major war within the Churches in Europe. It is 1427 and in Lutterworth, Leicestershire, grave diggers arrive at the local Churchyard. They are not making a grave; they are digging up a grave, the final resting place of a priest who died forty years before. Who would desecrate this grave and why? It happened by a specific decree of the Church, at the Council of Constance.

This is the grave of John Wycliffe. In life he had been perhaps the greatest scholar and teacher at Balliol college, Oxford University. Wycliffe was a student of the Bible, and of the Christian Church. It seemed to him that practice and principle did not match. High ranking Church officials lived in ease and splendour, while Jesus and his disciples had lived in poverty. The institutional Church owned almost a third of English land, while Jesus had no place to lay his head. Jesus taught Christians to give what is due to both God and Caesar. The Church collected taxes from the people of England, then sent the money to the papal court in France, where French cardinals supported the French king in his design to invade England. Wycliffe taught that Church taxes would be better spent to help the people of England, two thirds of whom lived in poverty.

In 1381, just three years before his death, Wycliffe boldly proclaimed that the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation was false. He taught that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper do not change substance and are merely symbolic of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wycliffe's protector, the giant John of Gaunt, refused to accept Wycliffe's denial of Rome's foundational doctrine. He warned Wycliffe to be silent about this, but Wycliffe refused, though he knew by his stand he would probably lose his protection from an earthly perspective. Gaunt did withdraw his guardianship, but Wycliffe put his trust in Someone who is larger than 6 foot 9 inches!

In May 1382, Wycliffe was called before yet another synod of ecclesiastical authorities. This was called the Blackfriars' Synod, because it was held in the monastery of Blackfriars in London (so named because of the black robes worn by the Dominican monks). When the 47 bishops and monks and religious doctors took their seats, a powerful earthquake shook the city. Huge stones fell out of

castle walls and pinnacles toppled. "Wycliffe called it a judgment of God and afterwards described the gathering as the 'Earthquake Council'"

The synod condemned Wycliffe, charging him specifically with 10 heresies and 16 errors. His writings were forbidden and the king gave authority to imprison all of those who believed the condemned doctrines. Wycliffe was expelled from his teaching position at Oxford at that time and was forced to withdraw to his parish of Lutterworth where he lived until his death. With his students he was the first to translate the Bible into the English language. This was 75 years before the invention of the printing press. The Bibles were hand written and hand copied. Church authorities declared it a crime to possess or read the Bible in the English language. They discovered many of Wycliffe's Bibles, and burned them. But over 200 survive to this day. He died of a stroke in December 1384, and was buried in the cemetery next to his Church.

These were the days when you could put a dead man on trial and the Catholic Church was not going to let the trivial matter of a heart beat come between them and vengeance. Church officials were frustrated that they had not been able to burn Wycliffe alive so they finally dug up his bones in 1427, held a mock trial and burned them. They threw his ashes into a nearby stream, which carried them to larger rivers and finally to the ocean. A later chronicler described this event in eloquent words. They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighbouring brook running hard by. Thus the brook conveyed his ashes into the Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow seas and they into the main ocean. And so the ashes of Wycliffe are symbolic of his doctrine, which is now spread throughout the world. Wycliffe was called "the Morning Star of the Reformation" a small light announcing a new dawn.

The English people were ignorant of the Bible, which was then available only in the Latin language. Priests and monks were supposed to be able to read Latin, but less than half of them could. Worship consisted in the chanting of Latin formulas which neither people nor priest could understand. Yet no matter how ignorant the priest, he claimed a power unique to his profession. When he held up the host and repeated the right words, a wafer of bread would miraculously become the actual body of Jesus Christ; wine became his blood.

Wycliffe read his Latin Bible carefully, but found nothing to support the claimed miracle. In fact he found the teaching was a much later development, which had been declared official dogma only two hundred years before Wycliffe's time. The people were also taught that God would forgive their sins only through Church officials, who could charge a fee for their services. Wycliffe read that by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God [Eph. 2:8]. God invites us to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need [Heb. 4:16]. Wycliffe sent his students throughout the land to share a simple gospel of hope and trust in God. These men were called Lollards which was the popular derogatory nickname given to those without an academic background, educated if at all only in English. These men became the itinerant preachers of the day and eventually marked men, burned for their faith.

On papal authority, agents of the Church sold indulgences, claiming that for a large fee, the souls of dead loved ones would be released from purgatory. Wycliffe wrote, "Men be great fools that buy these bulls of pardon so dear." If the pope had the power to snatch souls from purgatory, why did he

not in Christian charity take them out at once? It is of note that one of the first tasks of the newly invented printing presses, was printing indulgences. I think that you can get a idea of how much Christianity had degenerated in that age. Each Church was under the authority of a corrupt institution and the two edged sword hung above them all. How was it administered? **It is my opinion that it was administered through people that God raised up for that purpose.** We have been given the task and Christ supplies the arms. This answers our question. He uses His people to do His work but I think we already knew that, just as He raises the reprobate for judgement, "To show His Power". There are many Biblical precedents.

In the time of the Judges of Israel, the nation staggered from Crisis to Triumph at the hands of special people. *Jdg 2:14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.....Jdg 2:16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.*

Jdg 2:18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge:.....Jdg 2:19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers. This cyclic nature of commitment challenges each and every generation. If you have a revival of religion is not a guarantee of a future free from apostasy. Each generation must prepare itself for its own battles with evil.

Some of the heroes are reluctant, such as Gideon, who despite that calling of God, tested God twice using a fleece. We call it testing Providence. However he eventually defeated the enemies with the Sword of the Lord. *Jdg 7:20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.*

These men and women although all perfectly flawed, became people of faith and courage. *Heb 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*

Now, I think that the Church has lost something here because it has locked itself behind a barricade. For the most part it lives behind doors of a building called Church. This is all wrong. Jesus said we are to be on the attack, battering the gates of Hades themselves. *Mat 16:18I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* And Paul said that we are at war *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* I recall the C.H. Spurgeon's remark that the Church isn't a hotel its an army camp. We train to be capable of fighting the good fight.

Instead, the Churches have locked themselves behind closed doors where even Christ Himself is not welcome (behold I stand at the door and knock) and have failed to develop themselves to challenge the world. Brethren, the wars of Canaan continue. Among those failings in the Churches is the failure to develop the Deborah's of the age. Yes strange as it seems to the misogynist Churches today, God raised up a woman who could do a man's work in Israel. By not fully engaging the Christian sisters we have halved our army. *Jdg 4:4 And Deborah, a **prophetess**, the wife of Lapidoth, she **judged** Israel at that time.*

We might pause to consider what is going on here? How does this square with the roles of men and women and where does submission fit in? This will be difficult for the institutional Churches to grasp because what they pose as a Church today bears little or no resemblance to the NT Church. If we can for a moment distance ourselves from the institutional concept of a Church as a building or a denomination and go back to the biblical "people" concept, "living stones", then we can identify the work of the Church as it relates internally as the blood bought children of Christ and the work of the Church as it outreaches, the Church BEYOND Sunday we might say and how that interacts with the world.

There is an internal order of the Church as part of the kingdom of heaven in which we serve. God, the Angels, male and female (which will pass away) and because of the angelic presence women show their position in this order by covering their hair. In glory this will cease as male and female no longer exist. There is in this a future equality in God's presence. Now, this present Church order does not mean that women are less intelligent than men. That they are less capable of uttering the truth of God's word. That they are not intellectual equals. To the contrary they are well matched as helpmeets. In a manner of speaking, they, the sisters, humbly lay this equality aside in the Church assembly, for the glory of God's order. They will have it fully restored when they are in glory.

Move beyond the assembly, move beyond Sunday and there is no statute of limitations. I see no obstacles to any Christian woman undertaking an equivalent role to men in its outreach activities, committees, service to God in missions or in delivering the gospel to the unbelievers. Paul did not have a problem with this *Php 4:2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help **those women which laboured with me in the gospel**.* Lydia provided for a house Church *Act 16:40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

Husband and wife were a team *Act 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos,.....began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, **THEY took him unto them, and THEY expounded** (εξεθεντο) unto him the way of God more perfectly.* Phebe was a deacon or minister *Rom 16:1 I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant (διάκονον) of the Church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer (προστάτις = prostatis) of many, and of myself also.* Timothy would have been taught by Lois and Eunice. *2Ti 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

The role of women **IN** the Church assembly is one thing, outside of the Church assembly she has a high calling, Pro 31:29 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and **let her own works praise her in the gates.**

We may conclude in answer to our initial question regarding the Sword of Christ “**How does this happen and where has Christ done this in history?**” It is administered through Christ’s people and it happens in all ages.

My final questions were, **Does it happen today and how is repentance shown?** We are part of that historic nation of Israel, an unbroken succession of faithful yet flawed humanity fighting for the truth of Christ. *Rom 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;* We, the gentiles are grafted in to that ancient tree of Israel. We are according to Paul, true Jews and the Israel of God and we are fighting the same old enemies. I personally do not accept that the modern Zionist state of Israel will be given any greater privileges than any other Nation. The Olive tree was never cut down and anyone being grafted in, is done so in the same manner.

Christianity appears to cycle from Revival to Declension and back to Revival, each generation making its own decisions on following Christ. The population of Churches also changes over time and the issues that they face may vary but they have no excuse for not following the teachings of Christ. There are times in history when it seems as if there is no way back to Christ because men have fallen so far into sin, yet history recalls many returns, led by indomitable spirits.

George Whitefield was raised to call men to Christ and not surprisingly, he made many enemies from those who wished to carry on with business as usual. The life of an evangelist is not easy. Whitefield’s enemies would frequently try to disrupt his meetings by blowing loud trumpets and shouting obscenities. On some occasions violent mobs would actually attack those who were listening to his preaching, maiming the men and stripping off the women’s clothing. There are even reports of women being raped during his services.

Whitefield also suffered acutely from this vehement hatred, being stoned once, clubbed twice, whipped on at least half a dozen occasions and beaten an equal number of times. It was not infrequent for his sermons to be interrupted by having stones, dirt, manure and pieces of dead cat thrown in his face. On one occasion a man climbed a tree above where Whitefield was preaching. In an attempt to divert attention away from Whitefield, the man pulled down his trousers and exposed himself to the crowd. Failing to achieve the diversion he desired, the man began to urinate on Whitefield.

Despite this, Whitfield and Wesley persisted in calling Churches and people to repentance. How is that repentance shown? It is shown in the level of individual commitment to Christ and the things of Christ. It is shown in that hunger for His word and pursuit of His truth, *Php 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;* It is all consuming. It is the spiritual thermometer whereby we measure our warmth or coolness to God. It is the barometer that measures the altitude of our faith or the depths of our

depravity. It is the test of our faith. We are either wholly for Christ or we are against Him. There is no middle ground of compromise

Balaam may be dead and in hell but his descendents are alive among us to this day. The false gods have been disguised but they are same as of old. Next time we return DV we shall consider the rewards for obedience.

The white pebble

Part 43. Rev 2:17 ...To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Like many, we would skip over the nature of the contract (the covenant) and rush straight to the rewards section of the faith. We by nature would prefer the benefits without the effort, so this is why we have laboured over the previous verses before focussing on this. You do not get to this point without having overcome the difficulties along the way. You can forget the “hidden manna” and the “white stone” if you have not been a victor (νικάω) or “overcomer”. All of the Churches, even the ones performing well must “overcome”. We shall DV examine this phrase in a later ministry, but for now, what do you think that it means? The Church is not a benefits culture where you get rewards for nothing. You are either in the full time employment of Christ or you are nothing. You cannot be a part time Christian.

Do you remember our look at Richard Feynman who rejected “epaulettes” or human honours? Well, after all of those years of service, here it is, your reward, a pebble, all be it a white pebble. When you consider how lavish some of the gifts for service to the nation are and how exquisite the robes of ceremony are, this seems a little understated by the Creator of the Universe. “Oh, I was hoping for a little bit more than that”. Well, so you don’t get disappointed with your pebble, God has told you about it in advance and you can think about it and come to terms with it. You may come to understand the uniqueness of this gift and its significance.

Much has been made of the use of pebbles in voting in ancient cultures (the Greek ψῆφοι = Psephos), and that each voter received two stones, one white and the other black, the former to be used in the approval and the latter in the condemnation of a measure. Psephos is used in *Acts 26:10 That is what I did in Jerusalem. By the authority I received from the chief priests, I locked many Christians in prison. I voted to have them killed every time a vote was taken. GW*

Psephology is the scientific study of elections (the Latin word Suffragium also means a vote). However it wasn’t always stones that were used. Pottery was used. An ostrakon (ὄστρακον) is a piece of pottery (or stone), usually broken off from a vase or other earthenware vessel. In archaeology, ostraca may contain scratched-in words or other forms of writing which may give clues as to the time when the piece was in use. In Athens, the voting public would write or scratch the name of a person in the shard of pottery. When the decision at hand was to banish or exile a certain member of society, citizen leaders would cast their vote by writing the name of the person on the

piece of pottery; the vote was counted and if unfavourable, the person was exiled for a period of ten years from the city, thus giving rise to the term ostracism.

However, I do not think that the pebble here is indicative of any democratic voting process. For a start, there is only one pebble (not a white and black pebble) and again, I do not get to glory because of a unanimous vote that I deserved it. Christianity is not democratic. I think that the pebble has origins in the OT. The High priest of Israel had a breastplate upon which were written the names of the tribes. *Exo 28:21 And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes.... Exo 28:29 And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually.* Our Saviour bears our names upon His sacred heart into the presence of God. Our new names are on this pebble.

There is a holocaust memorial in Jerusalem called Yad Vashem which endeavours to safeguard the memory of the past and impart its meaning for future generations. It was established in 1953, as the world centre for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust. On the walls of a rotunda are hundreds of photographs of those exterminated in the death camps. Faces, some mournfully staring out of dead eyes at you, asking your remembrance.

Yad Vashem is Hebrew for a hand and a name. It is a quote from Isaiah. יד ושם Yad Vashem. Isa 56:5 Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place (yad) and a name (shem) better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Israel has attempted to create a memorial to these lives.

However, note this, that the modern Jews use “yad vashem” to refer to themselves, whereas the context in Isaiah is clearly referring to the **strangers or gentiles**. *Isa 56:3 Neither let the son of the stranger (נכר nêkâr = foreigner), that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: **Yad Vashem is a prophetic reference to the Church.*** It is a hand or a signpost showing “where” and a name showing “who”, pointing like a signpost to the person upon whom it is placed. A name better than sons and daughters even. *Isa 56:7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer:*

The gentiles were concerned that God would not accept them because they were the sons of strangers. This verse is confirmed in the Epistles, *Eph 2:19 Now therefore **ye are no more strangers and foreigners**, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; Eph 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*

The first point then regarding this passage in Revelation is that the Creator Redeemer gives us a name which is kept in His dwelling place. The name and the place go together. The name carries with it the idea of our security. It is a unique name, a memorial by God, a reminder that through the ages, we were ever before Him.

Then we observe that it is a new (καινός) name. There are two Greek words for "new" in the NT kainos and neos. Kainos is new in kind and in contrast to what previously existed, so taking the place thereof. The New Covenant uses καινός. Kainos is equivalent to "not yet having been". It is like something that exists but is unused so far. Neos is "not having long been", that is something that has just been made. Compare the two in this verse, *Luk 5:38 But new (νέος) wine must be put into new (καινός) bottles; and both are preserved.* The new (Kainos) name that we are given, exists but as yet is unused.

I don't know what sort of life you have lived but there have been times when I would have loved to disappear with a new identity. Times of guilt and shame, when the wretchedness brought by sin, cries out to be hidden and disguised. They say that your life passes before you when you drown. Can you imagine if this happens at death, the whole video of a life without Christ must be terrifying. For the believer, what ever passes at death, on the other side is the Saviour with a new name. It is the new you, the new identity, the passport for eternity.

Now that is something worth having.

A new Name

Part 44. Rev 2:17 ...To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

The white pebble, we suggested, did not have to be associated with a pagan Greek voting system or the declaration of justice. God's justice was displayed at the empty tomb. *Rom 4:25 Jesus was handed over to die for our sins, and he was raised from death to make us right with God. ERV* Raised for our justification. It was a cross and a grave, not a pebble that declares God's justice to me.

The Jews have a tradition that when they visit a grave they leave a stone behind. This is apparently part of a tradition dating back 3000 years ago, when Rachel was buried, a monument was set up on her grave. *Gen 35:20 Then Jacob set up a stone as a marker for her grave. The same marker is at Rachel's grave today. GW* The Jews by leaving a stone behind, take part in the building of that memorial. Christ's pebble however, is not a memorial of a life, looking backwards, as it were. It is a marker **looking forwards** to what we shall be, not what we were. Every one of us in Glory will all be holding our pebbles with our new names, but why?

What does a name stand for? We live in a time when names are more of a fashion attachment than a description of who we are or what it is hoped that we will become. Among the more bizarre offerings these days are Fifi-Trixibelle, Apple, Coco, Sage Moonblood, Blanket and Diva thin Muffin. I wonder if job applications will be taken seriously when these names top the CV?

The Hebrew names of people in the Bible were significant and have meaning in the lives of the individuals. For example, Peleg means "division," and Peleg lived when the earth was divided into its linguistic divisions at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 10:25). Abraham means "father of a multitude," reflecting the promise God made to Abraham (Genesis 15:5, 17:5). Noah suggests peace beyond the

curse of God's judgement. *Gen 5:29 And he called his name Noah (relief, comfort, rest), saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed.*

Perhaps one of the most interesting names is Methuselah. He was the oldest recorded living soul. *Gen 5:27 And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.* For those interested in seeing how longevity changed after the flood, just plot a chart of their ages at death. However, the point about Methuselah's name is that it can be translated as "When he dies it shall come". Did his parents understand what this meant? Did he himself wonder what it meant? Or did they receive it as a prophetic gift of God? I think that they must have done and every day Methuselah lived was a year nearer a coming event and that event was the great flood. Can you imagine living with a name like Methuselah?

Names in the Bible are important. The most important Name of all being the Name of the Creator. The Name is Sacred. *Exo 3:13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? Exo 3:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

The Name of God is a statement of who God is. Remember the Sunday school songs we sang? "The Name of the Lord is a strong Tower"? *Pro 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.* Did you ever think what that meant? How can a Name be a Tower? How can you run into a Name?

As far as it is revealed to us, God's Name is all that HE is and all that He does. So we may say that when we need that sanctuary and protection in this life, there is sufficient in the Creator and all that He is to give us confidence of safety. *Joh 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.* And *Mat 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* We do not gain our strength and protection by casting around in this world and relying on fallen man. It is by gazing upon God that we find renewed strength to rise up again. I have a list of 235 names for God and each one is a tablet, a precious remedy for the weary soul. Try those when you next feel low. That is something to think about!

We are invited to call upon that name. *Psa 105:1 O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people.* We use a phrase to describe visiting someone. We say we are going to call upon them. When we call or pray, we call upon the Name of God. Perhaps we should phrase our prayers such that we use the most appropriate names for God when we address Him, for example Jehovah Rapha for healing, or Counsellor for advice, or Shield when we feel oppressed? You see, the Bible encourages you to use the Name of God but purposefully and not blasphemously. It is the empty useage that is offensive *Exo 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

Let us take this thought further. When we misrepresent God or disobey Him, we blaspheme His name. *Eze 20:27 Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me.* We blaspheme not just in word but in deed. You see how easily God is defamed in the

media by Christians who say one thing and do another? Like this recent news story, “Dr Michael Reid, 69, spent 30 years as senior pastor at the Trinity Church, in Pilgrims Hatch, Essex, before the affair with Sheila Graziano came to light in 2008. The scandal rocked the Church and its congregation and led to the sacking of the bishop, who had been married to his preacher wife, Ruth, for more than 30 years at the time.” That doesn’t help the Christian cause does it, even if forgiveness is at hand?

Now I have laboured this point because if a name is sacred to the person of God, He too has that same care for the name that we shall bear and the person we are to become. It is the DNA of our new being. *Isa 64:4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.* It is all too amazing, too wonderful. It is quoted in the NT thus *1Co 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, **neither have entered into the heart of man**, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

We cannot even imagine it. That is how wonderful it is. In that new person we shall arise as, in the similitude of angels, we shall stand in awe at what unfolds before us. As we awake from death, our new senses take hold of the kingdom that we shall live in, surpassing all the combined majesties of this world, our hearts will sing without prompting, “Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns”.

Bread of Heaven

Part 45. Rev 2:17 ...To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

“Bread of Heaven” so goes the famous hymn, “Feed me now and evermore”. When the children of Israel complained that God had brought them into the wilderness to die, He promised them bread from heaven. *Exo 16:4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. It was given as a test of faith, whether they would walk in the Torah or not.* Would the people rely upon the Creator or would they lapse into a life of self.

The life of the nomadic tribe of Israel was not particularly harsh. They did not march every day and often pitched camp. The journey from mount Sinai to the borders of the promised land was only 11 days *Deu 1:2 (There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadeshbarnea.)* and the whole journey from Egypt would have only been about 14 days. In the event they spent 2 years in the wilderness before preparing to go into Canaan. *Num 1:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt...* The story as you know, then follows a course of disobedience punished by another 38 years in the wilderness, until that generation over 20 years of age had passed away. *Num 14:34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.*

The Israelites had been delivered from a nation that worked them to death, into a welfare state unknown in history to that time. Apart from collecting the bread from heaven and water from the well, they had time to come to know their deliverer. They could make the fabric and instruments of the Tabernacle, learn the laws of God and the offerings for sin and above all learn to Trust the Lord.

The heavenly bread was called Manna, which is Hebrew for “what is it” because they hadn’t a clue what it was. If you didn’t eat it on the day, it bred worms and stank the next day. It always had to be gathered afresh each day except on the 7th day when they had to gather twice as much *Exo 16:5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.* This was because the 7th day was the Sabbath of rest. In a sense the manna was a divine clock that indicated the Sabbath day. They kept a pot in the Ark of the Covenant as a reminder to future generations.

Manna was symbolic of something far higher, which we discover in the 6th chapter of John’s gospel. In the context of the chapter we see **two events, firstly** the feeding of the 5000 *Joh 6:10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.* **Secondly**, the questioning of Christ’s authority **Joh 6:30 They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?** Now this same crowd that had partaken in a miracle a day earlier had the brazen affront to question Jesus power. How soon are miracles forgotten.

Well did Christ say that *Joh 6:26 ... Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.* Many people are motivated to religion by short term gains. I have told you a story, that when I was in Africa, I remarked to someone that I had just won a small amount on my premium bonds. Quick as a flash, the person said, “I’ll come to your Church”. It is perhaps appropriate to ask ourselves the question, “what am I in it for?” Why do I follow Christ? Is it for the Knowledge of Him alone or just for the benefits I might get?

I don’t know whether you have seen the film “Heat” with Al Pacino and Robert De Niro? There is a scene in that film where De Niro’s character Neil McCauley says, ‘A guy told me one time, "Don't let yourself get attached to anything you are not willing to walk out on in 30 seconds flat if you feel the heat around the corner."' I like to think that we might just apply that to our Christian faith. How ready am I to follow Christ? *Mat 4:19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.* Am I a straightway guy? Or am I give me some time to think about it guy?

Last year a tragic plane crash in Zambia took the lives of a young missionary couple Jay and Katrina Erickson, both in their late 20s. They died when their plane crashed into the Zambezi River while returning from a neighbouring town to their mission in a local hospital. The trip happened to be the first one Katrina had taken since arriving at their post. The cause of the crash is still unknown. The couple had two daughters, ages two and one. Their family pastor in Spokane, Ron Ulmer, said the Ericksons were "very faithful Christians who worked hard at what they were doing," and their deaths were a "blow to the congregation." He added, "They were doing what they wanted to do. They had planned for it, and they felt like it was the Lord's will and that's what He had for them."

He continued, "The only sadness (and I do not intend to belittle this aspect) is in the loss of companionship by those left behind. And yet, to contrast this, the level of tragedy is so vast for the passing of an unbeliever. To borrow from physics, it seems the 'equal and opposite reaction.' It warms my heart to hear the frequent and fervent preaching of the Gospel here." You would have thought, God lead them there, blessed them with a family and life was going to be a wave of successes. Yet in the event, God lead them there to die in a plane crash in the Zambezi river. Does God know what he is doing? Of course He does and the work goes on". We are expendable.

Now you may have thought that you were indispensable to the Lord's plans and that if you were taken out of the way, the world would stop turning. You may have thought as a Christian, what will happen to all that I leave behind, my responsibilities, my family? If you have those thoughts you have totally missed the point of the Gospel. *Mat 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.* Do you really not believe that Christ will care for you and yours in Him?

Have you ever thought how God could raise the real "you" up from the end of the world? Its because He wrote your DNA and that's how He knows the hairs on your head. So I come back to the point I was making. If Christ came and said, right now, "are you coming with me to glory", what would you honestly say? Could you walk away from it all in 30 seconds? If you couldn't then you need to seriously examine your supposed relationship to Christ. It is weak and lacking in trust. You have other things in your life which are far more important than Him and perhaps equally relevant, things which you have not been able to commit to Him. Paul says, in faith, *2Ti 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

Now we return to the antithesis in the text of John 6. There is the feeding of the 5000, a temporal illustration and the revelation of Christ as the bread of Life, the Living bread, the True bread, the Everlasting bread, the bread of Heaven. I think that these events are set in antithesis for a purpose. Often Jesus gives an outward sign as a token of a deep unseen truth. For example, *Luk 5:22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.*

They were just words weren't they. Air vibrating from the same Divine throat. "Your sins are forgiven" and "Rise up and walk" are just words. How could we know the truth of that? When the man got up, the truth would dawn that his sin's too had been forgiven by that same breath. No lying, bloviating, hot air. Only truth comes from the mouth of God on which we too should live. And that is the point here in John 6. You saw the miracle now heed the message. You need the true bread. *Joh 6:48 I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.* Christ reveals Himself as the manna from heaven. The sustainer of life.

Joh 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

Now you can see why we have the Lord's table. It is symbolic. *1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do **shew**⁵ the Lord's death till he come.*

I think those words "you show" is a poor translation, in my opinion. The word "show" is translated "preach" in *Act 4:2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and **preached** through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. Act 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have **preached** the word of the Lord, and see how they do.* Also it is rendered "teach" *Act 16:21 And **teach** customs, which are not lawful for us to receive.*

The table is the gospel of Christ's death. It is the Passover. *Exo 12:26 And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.* You see, we must get away from the symbols of bread and wine to the reality behind it. That reality is deliverance by the Saviour.

I get a sense that the AV translators were still trying to mystify rather than de-mystify the Lord's table. That's what the institutional Church does to keep its hold on people. I read this week that there were three words that Tyndale translated that infuriated the predominantly Catholic Church in England. The words were Church, Priest and Charity. Thomas More said of Tyndale that he "dyd euyll in translatynge the scryptre in to our tonge". Why? Because it undermined the institutional organisation that was stripping the poor and unlearned of their money and their salvation.

Tyndale you see, had correctly translated the greek Congregation, Elder and Love. He translated ecclesia as congregation, instead of Church, because of the wrong association of Church with building rather than people. He translated episcopos (Overseer) as Elder (Presbyter) rather than Bishop because of the false association of a ruling elite in the congregation. As I have said before, the red Catholic cow was painted black by the Church of England. Reformation was a repaint and a shuffle but everything in principle stayed the same and the people kept being robbed of the truth.

The word agape, love is **mis-translated** as charity 28 times in the AV! *1Co 13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.* Charity with its connotations of works and donations promoted the interests of the established Church and was thus retained in the AV despite being incorrect because as we have said, the AV was not given from Mt Sinai as many

⁵ Καταγγέλλω katangellō. This word is related to the word for angel, hence message, gospel, teaching etc.

protestants think but from the Established Institutional Church of England. At this point they rejected Tyndale's translation.

The Lord's Table in Corinthians is an opportunity to preach Christ until He come. The Catholic interpretation is to hold up the bread as an object of worship, the elevation of the host. However, the object to be set before our eyes are not the emblems of bread and wine but Christ Himself and it is here that we draw the strands of this ministry together.

When God delivers His people, as for example out of Egypt, He also sustains them. Deliverance (the Passover) and sustenance (the Manna) go together. God fed the people with manna, the heavenly bread for the period of their sojourn. This bread had a far higher meaning as it symbolised Christ Himself. The Lord's table, instituted at the Passover uses the bread as a reminder of the body of Christ broken for us. We continue to remind ourselves of this, as often, until we meet Him again.

It is at that point, at that very meeting, we have revealed to us the "hidden manna". What has been up to that point been shrouded in mystery and symbols turns to reality. Christ Himself, the Bread of Life is now before us. *1Co 15:54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

And this is the point. Eternal life is not sustained by ourselves. The life giving energy for eternity comes from the very staff of life Himself, Christ. He alone has immortality and that He graciously imparts to you and me. *1Ti 6:16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.* We become partakers of the divine nature. The hidden manna is Christ's eternal provision for our eternal life. Never forget that. We are and always will be creatures, albeit new creatures, but none-the-less creatures. We can never, ever sustain ourselves.

Heavenly people, hellish teaching

Part 46. Rev 2:18 And unto the angel of the Church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath **his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass**; Rev 2:19 I know thy works, and charity (love), and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

That He should appear to us in so fearful a guise is warning in itself against our complacency and over familiarity. It frightened away Daniel's companions and reduced him to nothing. We must never forget that the gentle carpenter of Nazareth is also the Ancient of days *Dan 7:9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.* (See also Rev 1 v 13). It should frighten us too. It is the image of horror movies.

How do we see Jesus? How do we approach Him? I think that there are times that we feel very close and almost as it were lean on His bosom as a child. At other times overwhelmed with His majesty we stand back in awe. If we have done evil, we fall at His feet in silence and account, yet at other times we can dance and sing in His presence. Relationships are not always fixed in their approaches and responses. *Gen 4:7 You know that if you do what is right, I will accept you. But if you don't, sin is ready to attack you.* That you see is why we need **self-examination**. *1Co 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* Our attitude can change the relationship. We must not presume on that relationship. *1Co 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*

So it is when we examine the Church at Thyatira we find no comment on the validity of their works, or that the good outweighs the bad, rather that **what is important** is that being neglected. There is no comment on the quality of prayers, the strength of the ministry of the word, the power of the hymns, the size and generosity of the collections. It is the defects that draw the attention. Like a boil on someone's nose, a swollen eye, a sore on the lip, it becomes the centre of attention. God is ever concerned with the defects and omissions of faith. Be it from the blemished sacrifice to the breaking of the smallest command, all are important. As the ruler found out, Jesus was more interested in what he had left out of the commands. *Luk 18:21 And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, **Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.***

The Roman Catholic Church have something called works of supererogation. Supererogation is the technical term for the class of actions that go "beyond the call of duty." The Latin etymology of "supererogation" is paying out more than is due (super-erogare). These actions are believed to form a reserve fund of merit that can be drawn on by prayer in favour of sinners. Supererogation has long had a special meaning within the Roman Catholic Church for acts that are morally good but not required for salvation by God. This teaching was countered in the 14th Article of the CoE. Is there any merit now, in the things we are required to do? *Luk 17:9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

Our duties are known to the Lord, later they will be assessed as to their eternal worth as gold or stubble but for now we are not profitable.

The works of Thyatira cover love, service, faith, and patience. The later works are more than they were originally. This is on the face of it a really nice bunch of people. They welcome you warmly to their meetings, they come round if you are not too well and there is nothing that they wouldn't do for you. They are patiently getting on with their lives believing in Jesus and lovingly serving the community. They probably have a food bank and a charity shop and they unstintingly volunteer their time in the service of others. In their homes, they doubtless have a text on the wall "Christ is the Head of this house" under which they sit when they say grace at meals.

These people are regular decent folk, modest pillars of their society, quietly going about their business. They don't like too much deep reading, "Daily Light" or "Every day with Jesus" is about as deep as it gets. Of course, they read their Bibles every day but they don't study them. If you were to ask something about a text they would find it hard to answer, other than generally. Its not that they hate doctrine or teaching, its just that they find it distracting from other activities they see as more important. Of course, if you pursue matters of faith in depth that disagrees with their shallow interpretation, you will be labelled legalistic or ungracious. Their knowledge hangs on cobwebs.

They are however open to new ideas, probably like this one I saw this week "10 Reasons to Stop Preaching". Quote: "A few years ago, we came across a learning tool that (in our opinion) does away with the need for sermons. Its called "Simply the Story," and it was designed as a way to help non-literate cultures dig deep into God's story and discover spiritual truths for themselves. Unlike sermons, everyone is involved. Everyone gets a chance to listen to the story, retell the story, explore the story and apply it to their own lives and context". Needless to say, one of the reasons was "People aren't good at listening. Research shows that people's attention ebbs and flows during a sermon or lecture. At best, they have 10-15 minutes of sustained concentration for passive listening." Yes, this is fast food to the hungry soul, the MacDonald's of spiritual cuisine, Kentucky fried faith.

Its good to be at the cutting edge of Church fashion, like the "Messy Church" we spoke of recently. After all culture changes and we adopt new ways of life. You know, it's the argument, why hair coverings belong to the old world of Corinth but not to our enlightened age. These folks at Thyatira are progressive, broad minded and open to anything new, a bit like those philosophical voyeurs, who hung around the Areopagus in Athens, like men in dirty raincoats, hoping to find something new. Compromise is the key to Thyatira's success and in that we will not upset our neighbours.

And that my friends is why the Churches were for centuries mixing the gospels with the philosophies of Plato and the ancient Greeks. They had equal value. Just as today we mix humanism in large doses into the teaching of the Churches. What God condemned in time past has been rehabilitated and put in the main stream of faith. We must now accept homosexuality as it is no longer a sin, because we know better than the bigotry of the early Christians. There never was a Reformation as we said recently. There was only a rearrangement.

So, it is my view that every Church has a duty to return to its New Testament roots and examine how far it has been led astray from it basic teaching and practice and that is where we come back to Thyatira. Thyatira has a wide acceptance of other teachings and that has really upset the Lord and that is why He is flaming at the doors.

You can never be too doctrinal

Part 47. Rev 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

We considered the fact, last time that the Lord Jesus is concerned more with what we don't do or do wrong, than with what we do right. One day when Jesus was having a meal with His disciples, He was questioned about the company that He was keeping. He replied thus: *Mat 9:1 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? Mat 9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* We are all of us sick with the malady of sin. It is a cancer in our lives, threatening death and destroying our soul's.

We do not go to the doctor's because we are well. We would be accused of wasting their time, because there was nothing wrong with us. We go only when we are sick or infirm and that is why Jesus is concerned to put right in our lives the things which are wrong, because He is the great physician. I note that many Church services just rush in with a hymn and a prayer, without a thought that there is a need for self examination and reconciliation with God. We have a terrible presumption that all is well between us and the Lord when often it is not. I love the Cranmer's confession that starts the morning service thus:

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind In Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

I imagine, like us, the Thyatiran Church was quite happy that they were doing well, mostly at least. And had they not had this message from Christ and heeded it, no doubt, they would all have been destroyed by the teaching that was infiltrating their Church but for this intervention. Its not clear how the infiltration started. The Jezebel was not necessarily teaching in the meetings so I will not go down the path of women teaching in meetings. I can tell you from my own early Christian experience though, that I have seen this influence occur in ordinary gatherings where it penetrates like a poison.

The Thyatirans just could not see what was going on and even if they had, nobody was confronting it. I think that like most Churches, the messages from the pulpit must not upset the congregation and offend the practices that they have adopted. No medicine must be dispensed. Rather, ministries are like beaters in a shoot, scaring the bad birds into sight only to be shot down over their heads. The fire is always over their heads not into their midst. So everyone goes away with a good feeling that we have slain the small dragons and that we can all feel good because we have nothing to go away and do. To go back to our medical analogy, some ministries have a neutral message. Its like going in to a doctor and being told don't worry, its not you but its everyone else who is ill and sick.

Well, who is this Jezebel? We might gain some clues as to her character from her namesake in the OT. Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab and there is no doubt that he would do anything for her above

his God, *1Ki 16:31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.*

Like Solomon's many wives, Ahab's wife led him astray. Jezebel spent a lot of time pursuing the prophets of God. *1Ki 18:4 For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.* Elijah confronts and defeats the priest of Baal and Jezebel swears revenge on him. Ahab is a weak man and a coward (as is shown at his death) who sulks when he doesn't get his own way and when he cannot fulfil his desire to purchase Naboth's vineyard, Jezebel concocts a plan to destroy Naboth. *1Ki 21:7 And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.* Which she does by accusing the poor man of blasphemy.

Two curses then pursue Ahab. *1Ki 21:18 Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. 1Ki 21:19 And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.* AND *1Ki 21:23 And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. So it was that Naboth the Jezraelite would have justice done on his own land.*

Ahab met his end in battle and the prophecy was fulfilled *1Ki 22:38 And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake.* Jezebel later met her equally unglamorous end although she always wanted to look her best, little does she know it is for the last time. *2Ki 9:30 And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.* Jehu son of Nimshi, as you recall was a "furious driver" and must have been seen thundering across the land to Jezreel. No nonsense Jehu, gets the servants to throw her out of the tower and she dies.

Jezebel is a nasty piece of work who spent her life undermining and destroying the servants of God. The term Jezebel has come down in history to describe someone who is manipulative, controlling, and brazenly apostate within some religious context. How did she get into Thyatira? Herman Hoeksema⁶ the theologian has crafted a scenario which may give you an idea.

⁶ Behold He Cometh.

How do we guard against the subtlety of error in the Church without creating witch hunts and inquisitions? How do we know when to let a view reside as a personal opinion and when do we declare it as a heresy? I want to starting to answer this question.

A principle developed by the Protestant Reformers was called “The analogy of Faith” or “The analogy of Scripture”. An analogy is a comparison made to show a similarity or a relationship between subjects. I may talk about atomic structure and use an analogy, the solar system, to describe the atomic structure because there are similarities. We may say, using analogies, that shells were to ancient cultures as dollar bills are to modern culture, that a shoe is to foot as tire is to wheel and that followers are to a leader as planets are to a sun.

The analogy of faith was a key principle of interpretation taught by the Reformers which teaches that Scripture should interpret Scripture. This principle is stated in the Westminster Confession (1.9) in this manner: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

Charles Hodge, in his Systematic Theology, explains why. "If the Scriptures be what they claim to be, the word of God, they are the work of one mind, and that mind divine. From this it follows that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. God cannot teach in one place anything which is inconsistent with what He teaches in another." In other words, there is a divine harmony in scripture whereby, what is taught in one place is in harmony with the same subject taught in another place. They are analogous.

If you can grasp this idea, then it means that we derive our beliefs from an overall scriptural view. Scriptures taken in context, not simply a single verse out of context. For example, *Exo 20:9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work*: Taken at its literal face value it would prohibit any activity but we know that this is not the correct interpretation. Why? Because we know that there are other scriptures which improve the analogy. Scriptures like *Num 28:10 This is the burnt offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering*. Jesus refers to this when accused of Sabbath breaking *Mat 12:5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?*

Of course the commandment may further be refined in the NT *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Col 2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ*. The point is this, that in order to find the fullness of meaning in a biblical subject we must consider the scriptures as a whole and not as a series of isolated texts. To do this, we must be familiar with our Bibles and that means both the Older and Newer testaments.

So why do you think the Thyatirans allowed the teaching of Jezebel to flourish and what could they have said to counter her teachings?

The guilt of evangelism

Part 48. Rev 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

We considered last time how we would resolve a particular teaching in scripture so as to avoid being led into error and we suggested using the “analogy of scripture”. Thyatira had fallen into a doctrinal error through a Jezebel. I know many people who are against doctrine in the Churches because they think that it stifles expression. However, doctrine means teaching and where Churches consider all opinions as valid and that we are all entitled to our own views, we shall see the growth of error.

Pause to consider how this error comes in. There is a false view that the Church exists as a **service to humanity** as a whole. It does not. The Church is a gathering of believers, the body of Christ, purchased with His blood, the pillar and ground of truth. The Church exists to serve Christ and build its members up in the faith. It is not the duty of the congregation to invite the non-believer to its meetings and activities. *1Co 14:23 IF therefore the whole Church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?* There is in that statement NO invitation to unbelievers to enter the congregation. God does not invite the unworthy to participate in His household. What fellowship has light with darkness? So how do unbelievers get in?

The existence of unbelievers in congregations has many roots. One may be in the initial actions of a group of people trying to establish a Church. Instead of forming organically, they come together through a process that fails to emphasise **the necessity of repentance**, conversion, forgiveness of sin and baptism. Before they know it, they are a mixed multitude. People in this situation might live a whole life thinking that they are part of the body of Christ when they are plainly not.

Another cause is that the **Church becomes institutionalised**. It is no longer a group of people, it is a place to go and worship at. It is not a congregation of the faithful, it is a shrine of worship run by a professional elite, the clergy, the reverends, the self appointed protestant popes. In these places, the attendees perform a liturgy (hymn sandwiches) and it is very easy for anyone to attend. There is also no opportunity to fellowship and share individual faith and ministry. In these places, the unbeliever can flourish and even influence the direction of teaching. How else do you think homosexuality came to be part of the teaching of mainstream Institutional Churches? It did not come through believers!

Then there is a **false evangelism**. People are often invited in to meetings because of the guilt Christians are under to evangelise. This can come in many guises. It can come in the guise of confirmation or an alpha course, which takes a person to a point where faith becomes an understanding of a series of teachings. It can inoculate people against Christ. Evangelism is reduced to a process of episodes largely because there are very few true evangelists and teachers. Christians, moved by a sense of guilt in not doing enough, try to invent methods of saving the lost by not upsetting them too much.

When I look at the growth of the NT Church, I see this. There are people **Christ has given** to the Church (not given by an institution of trainers) *Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;* They are the builders. Evangelism is **directed** by the Spirit of Christ (not by a feeling of duty) *Act 8:28Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*

Conviction of sin and conversion are not drawn out affairs. They happen quickly because they are urgent matters. *Act 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.* No hanging about. The unregenerate, the unbeliever, enter the congregation through the weakness of the teaching and ministry of that body. Like a virus, they attack the weak body because it has not built any defences. It has not maintained a healthy body nor fed on a wholesome diet. It is prey to disease.

This self appointed prophetess (she calls herself a prophetess) is working hard to introduce the Church to fornication and things sacrificed to idols. She is “permitted” to do so and this would suggest that there is a distinct lack of sound doctrine in the Church of Thyatira (and possibly no teachers). Paul warned of these days in a letter to Timothy 40 years earlier (AD 63) *2Ti 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.* It is not clear whether Thyatira had a copy of this or had heard about it?

The Churches that appoint their own teachers to support their own views rather than scripture are living in the world of fables. If you asked me at this stage in my life of faith, would you consider going to a Bible school or encourage someone to go, I would say no. My opinion is that Bible schools serve to **promote their own views and denominations**. They cannot be neutral and each promulgates its Church view and promotes itself. Colleges can become “reverend factories”. A man of God can only be a teacher by appointment of Christ and that never involved colleges.

I wrote to the Bible league last year as follows:

“I was disappointed in the Bible League Article June 2012 on the Alpha course to see that it was blasphemous for the Pope to be "Holy Father" but it is quite correct for the man who writes about it to take on the title "Reverend". It might be an idea to take out the splinters before tackling the planks? However, I guess its just another verse of "you in your small corner and I in mine"? Christian greetings, Mike”.

The reply was:

“When a minister is called "Rev." it is simply a courtesy title meaning no more than that he is a holy man or a man of God. It also has the added advantage of assuring a suspicious world that he is not a member of some cult, and often opens doors of opportunity for witness and ministry that perhaps would be denied a less familiar Christian worker.”

Now that is the sort of reply that I would expect from an Institutional Church. It “often opens doors of opportunity for witness and ministry”! Not one shred of scriptural support. Now from where I stand, it identifies a cult to me.

Jezebel in Thyatira has gained some credibility and it is an unseen problem requiring urgent treatment. It is a silent cancer that will kill them all unless treated. How should we test prophets or prophetesses? Clearly it was a big problem for the fledgling Church. *1Jn 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because **many false prophets** are gone out into the world.* We might test them by whether their words came to pass yet this is not infallible. False prophets do miracles. *Rev 16:13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.*

Signs and wonders then, are only proof of signs and wonders. What Moses could do, the Egyptians could do. *Exo 7:10 And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.*

Could we test the false prophets doctrine by scripture? Yes we could but that fledgling Church didn't have the scripture as we have it. Certainly, there was access to the Older Testament but the NT was still coming together. So in many respects they were disadvantaged. However, the fundamental moral principals of the OT must stand for the early Church until they, by the grace of God, are shown to have been changed or superseded. Let me try and explain this. I do not believe that the scripture teaches that Judaism fell apart when Christ died upon the cross and that suddenly all Jews were disenfranchised, homeless or faithless. That the OT was completely dead.

I will call this a “Ripple” effect. The gospel rippled out from Jerusalem through the preaching of the Apostles. As they went into synagogues to teach the Jews about the work of the Prophet Jesus, the Spirit confirmed their message. In doing so, the changes in worship were brought in. *Act 13:43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, **persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.*** You see, they were still in the grace of God not having heard of Christ but to continue in the grace of God they must embrace Jesus. The gospel washes over them and washes some away, while others continue.

Similarly, *Act 18:25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him **the way of God more perfectly.*** The man was nearly there but not quite. In the early Church, error becomes an error, when overtaken by new revelation. Clearly, there was the possibility that Jezebel had a valid new teaching so why not accept it? However it is so contradictory to the OT that it must be justified or thrown out.

The OT makes it clear that what the Thyatirans were doing was wrong. *Num 25:1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.* How had this Thyatiran Church not become versed in the OT? They had access to that scripture because Christ quotes it to them, which would be meaningless if they didn't have it.

Well, the shameful fact is that less than 10% of Christians in our day have read the whole Bible, let alone studied it. I will not embarrass you by asking if you have or not but you can see the consequences. Thyatira were not much into scripture although they were into good works. In a survey, LifeWay Research found that 90 percent of Churchgoers agree with the statement, "I desire to please and honour Jesus in all I do." But only 19 percent read the Bible every day. About 25 percent read the Bible a few times a week. Not surprising then that ignorant people fall prey to the devil. Yes, we are lazy, when it comes to studying scripture and it is to our shame. When satan comes knocking we shall be hard pressed to tell him like Jesus did "it is written". Where?

I remember as a young Christian having a Bible reading and we were choosing a passage. I suggested 1 Corinthians 13. "Oh no said a lady, I've read that". Heaven literally help you if the Bible is a one read book. Whatever will you find of interest in Glory? The Thyatiran teaching of Jezebel, is one that is fundamental to the New Testament Church, as it defines its doctrine for the Church, composed of Jews and Gentiles.

You can read about it in Acts chapter 15.

Resolving doctrine

Part 49. Rev 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

How should we sort out issues of doctrine in the Church? The Thyatiran teaching of Jezebel, is one that was discussed by the New Testament Churches, as that body defined its doctrine for a Church composed of Jews and Gentiles. **Read Acts 15.** The issue raised in the fledgling community of Christ was *Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.* There was a view that circumcision was a fundamental teaching that must be carried into the Church. This of course had implications for many other teachings of Moses and could have opened a floodgate of OT practices.

How was it dealt with? Here we see the boundaries of the Apostleship. Peter does not act as Pope and make a unilateral pronouncement on the matter. There is no imprimatur from Peter. An imprimatur (from Latin, "let it be printed") is, in the proper sense, a declaration authorizing publication of a book. It is a matter for the body of apostles AND elders to arrive at a conclusion. It is **not a one man decision** and there is a very good reason for this. One man cannot be in possession of the completeness of Christ. We each and everyone of us can only display so much of Christ and not one of us can represent Christ fully on earth. Let me explain.

1Co 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? The body of Christ, that is, the representation of Christ, is composite. The human body is composed of various organs *1Co 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many.* We might say today that we have the DNA of God by our new birth as it is in all of the cells of the body of Christ but we have unique functions in that body. One person cannot be that body but he can be part of it.

So, when Christians come together, each with their gifts and calling, they assemble the body of Christ and so minister to one another. That is the idea of a Church congregation. That is why assemblies should allow all to participate and contribute, dare I say all should contribute. It is not a one man show by a hired pastor. None of the apostles had the arrogance to lead the community single handed, neither did they invest leadership in a single elder but multiple elders.

As well as considering our gifts, we should consider our deficiencies lest we are led away to take on more than we should. Also, we should never consider that a calling to minister carries with it infallibility. We are all prone to human weakness. Peter was himself led away in error in Galatia. I know my calling to teach but I also know that I am not an evangelist, a prophet or an apostle. I would be wrong to trespass into those areas because I am not fitted for them. What are your limitations as a Christian? That is why we need the other members.

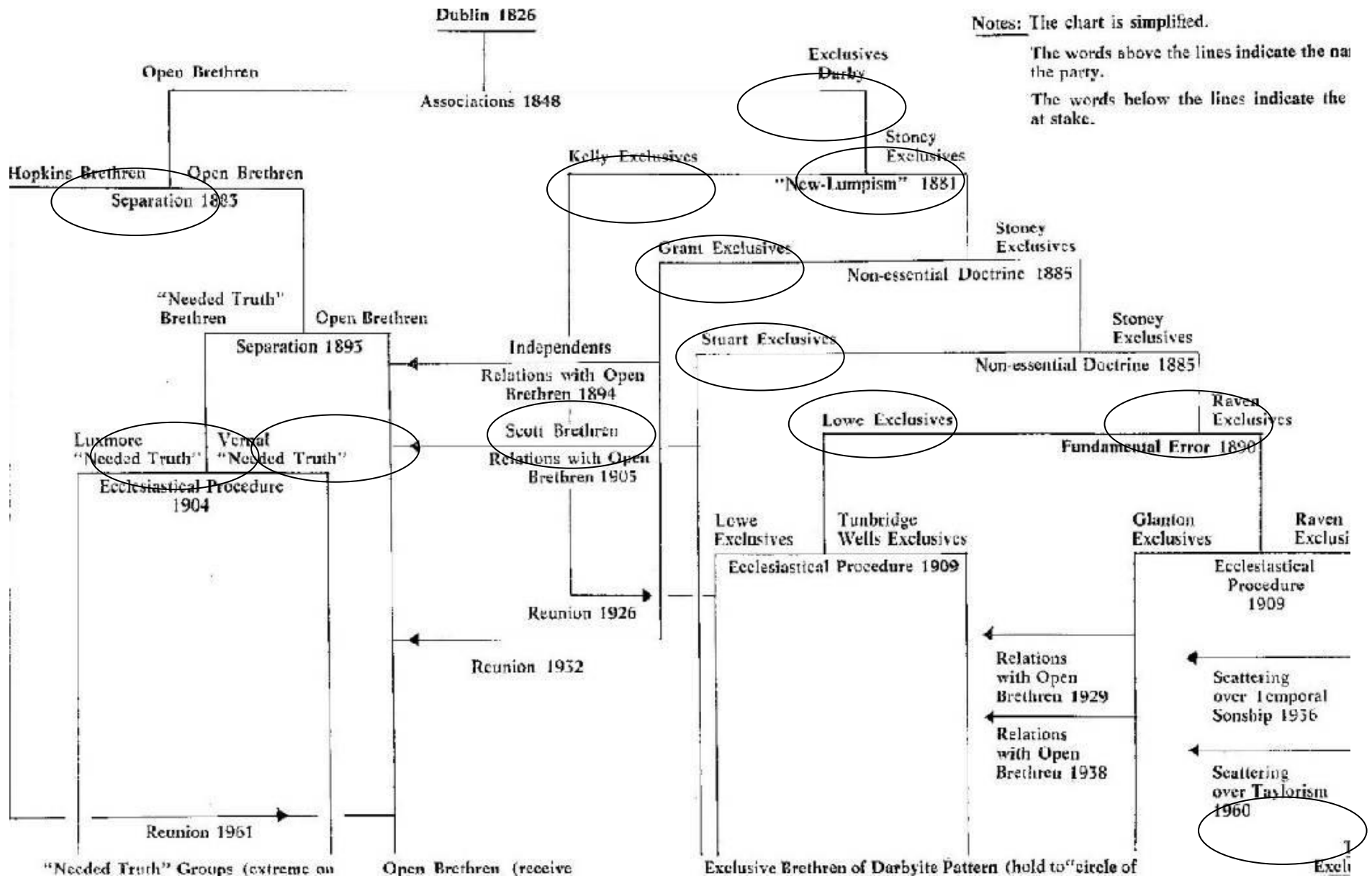
In coming together at Jerusalem to discuss the issues of circumcision, the body of Christ formed to articulate a solution, not without much discussion *Act 15:7 And after there had been much debate...* You can hear their minds grinding out the scriptures, the things God had done of late, pouring the knowledge together (the analogy of scripture), each providing, like artists all contributing to the painting to make a complete picture. Peter recalls the events with Cornelius and the acceptance of the gentiles by the **giving of God's spirit**. That was proof enough that God had accepted the gentiles. Barnabas and Paul contribute with further proof of God's favour to the gentiles, **without any mention of the need for circumcision**. James then draws the strands together from the OT *Act 15:16 "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord.* This leads to a general conclusion that the gentiles should not be troubled with this, however, there was a caveat. *Act 15:2 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.*

They had reached an "accord" which they then put out in an encouraging letter. *Act 15:30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.* The body of Christ, the Church, had solved a potentially divisive issue. And that leads me back to Thyatira. Thyatira did not behave as a body in respect to the teaching of Jezebel. That woman had acted unilaterally to introduce a teaching into the Church. It was not questioned and it was not examined in the light of other scriptures. It was swallowed whole, yet the OT alone condemned it.

If you look at the history of error in the Churches, it seldom if ever comes from the deliberations of a group of believers. They are the errors of **ONE person** who superimposes their view on the body. One classic example of this can be seen in the history of the Plymouth brethren. Nearly all of the schisms are named after individuals. (See chart). The “exclusives” under Jim Taylor invented a whole rule set, such as members must not join a trade union or a professional association, live in the same building with non-members, even a semi-detached house is unacceptable as it shares a common wall with the house next door and this is applied to paths or drive-ways to houses and even to sewers. Business links are also prohibited. TV, films, radio, novels, public swimming, a mobile phone or CB radio are all banned. Nor can they buy life insurance or have a house pet. Beards and moustaches are forbidden, as is dating. A couple who want to court and marry must obtain the approval of the ‘man of God’. Computers as well as faxes are outlawed. This is how a Church becomes a cult, a group with extreme beliefs. Jim Taylor died of alcoholic poisoning!

It highlights the need within Churches for multiple ministries and leadership. This as we said earlier is the concept of the “body of Christ”, where Christ is pre-eminent *Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. Too often, there is a Diotrephes, who will commandeer the people. 3Jn 1:9 I wrote unto the Church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.*

Who is responsible for the error of Jezebel? It is the body of Christ itself **“because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel”**. Corporate responsibility. If there are bad things in your Church, you are all responsible. You cannot opt out and leave it to others. Jezebel is the outcome of corporate neglect, failure to investigate the teaching, failure to confront the teaching, failure to condemn the teaching and failure to remove the teaching. It is also the result of individual weakness in the face of sin.



The enemy within

Part 50. Rev 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the Churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Not only do individuals suffer for unchristian behaviour, so do Churches. The unholy belief that somehow, professing to be Christian carries with it immunity from all evil in this life is proven to be false. I mentioned last week, the strange rules of the Exclusive Brethren, yet even stranger was the behaviour of their leader James Taylor Jr. There are some aspects of what I will tell you that have striking parallels with Thyatira.

You recall Hoeksema's attempt to reconstruct a scenario as to how Jezebel gained power in the assembly? Descending into the depths of sin and satan would somehow reveal the grace of God. Well, that is the excuse James Taylor Jr, who took over the leadership of the Exclusive Brethren used to justify his behaviour in what has become known as the "Aberdeen" incident⁷ which occurred in July 1970. By that October he was dead. The incident was the low point of Taylor's increasing erratic behaviour which saw his not only propositioning women in the Church but being found in bed with one and drunk at a Church meeting.

Taylor had such influence that he as "the man of God" was considered pure, a belief in the purity of Taylor and of their entire successions of leaders has become foundational to the Exclusive Brethren following. In their own words "the testimony stands or falls on the purity of a Man of God". The Exclusive Brethren subscribe to an accepted explanation that any behaviour of Taylor which had the appearance of evil was done under God's direction and with the deliberate intention of provoking into the open a strata of evil entrenched within the fellowship. His actions were said to be an ambush.

By "ambush", was then a test to catch people out. Consequently, some of these people believed that Taylor was acting out of pure motives. That he was somehow inspired by God to do the things that he did. That he was led by the Spirit, infallible, perfect and right. He had so taken hold on their minds that they even considered his pronouncements to override the teachings of the Bible.

The plea of "ambush" implies behaviour which was apparently not pure but was done with a pure motive - that is to say it was not done in response to his natural desires or his fantasies. The explanation might possibly hold up if this behaviour was limited to one incident and with the cooperation of the other party. Taylor's behaviour which was transcribed from audio tapes and well documented, showed that his behaviour was blasphemous. His example also led the Church away from the scriptural teachings on marriage. In short he was a wicked man doing satan's work.

⁷ <http://www.discourses.org.uk/History/TheAberdeenIncident.pdf>

This explanation is accepted as sufficient by those who remained in the Exclusive Brethren fellowship but the explanation is rejected almost without exception by those who are separated from the fellowship. Members of the Exclusive Brethren fellowship readily acknowledge that Aberdeen is a crucial issue. They freely accept that the matter is baffling to the human mind and will contend that faith and simple acceptance are essential for the privilege of being in the fellowship. However they are not comfortable with engaging in open discussion or factual inquiry as to the validity of their belief. They tend to resort to dismissive responses such as "God has not granted him/her the light" or "the drinkers got it but the thinkers missed it".

Taylor brought Christianity into disrepute and these incidents made the National and International press. I suspect that the damage done extended far beyond the brethren to Christianity as a whole. However, the Lord dealt with it and Taylor was removed. The scene recorded at his death bed is a warning in itself.

"He was not at peace, despite what others may have said, or what has been circulated in letters to inform others of his death. My own recollection is that he was disturbed, especially with Renee his wife, and he distinctly told her, "Get out of here woman, you were never with me". He was quieter for some moments, then just before he died there came upon him an almost indescribable horror, the expression on his face was one of abject terror. He opened his mouth to speak, however he did not actually say anything, his breathing very laboured, and erratic. It was in this state that he died."

Now I do not want to give the impression that all the exclusive brethren are unbelievers and cranks. They were however the product of indoctrination and peer pressure. Their whole lives were tied into the movement and to be put out was something not to be contemplated. If you dared to question the leadership, you were put out. Such was the power of Taylor, people kept quiet. They were not without their good works and charity (The UK however has refused them charitable status). Like Thyatira and were far from being bad people.

Like Thyatira, they suffer the evil in their midst, seemingly powerless to change the situation. They submitted and responded as was expected of them by their leader. There were many who did not like the situation and kept quiet, others left, however, there comes a time when Christ will intervene for His own Names sake. *Rev 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.*

The seductive teaching of the Jezebels and Taylors of this world, leading astray the children of God will be brought to an end by Christ Himself. Ephesus had the strength to try the evil in its midst *Rev 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: **and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:*** Thyatira did not have that strength. It is perhaps because we are all so different that the body of Christ differs in its manifestation, gifts and strengths.

What can we learn? **Beware of denominations led by one person** and beware of Churches who are a one man show. Beware of the **cult of self**. Beware of teachings that are introduced by a single person, even in the name of holiness. If a man goes beyond scripture, do not listen to him. Beware of the Church where the Bible is not good enough to solve an issue of faith. If a man claims to be totally pure, then get him to take his socks off, look at his feet and look at his hands. No holes, then walk on past and keep walking. Only Christ was perfect. Beware of those who tap into your bank account in the name of giving, especially the “tithers”. Beware of those who have rules for joining a Church when Christ alone is the rule. *Rev 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith **unto the Churches***;

All of the 7 Churches have a lesson to teach us if we will but hear.

Vipers nests

Part 51. Rev 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

Repentance was offered but tribulation was the alternative. Do Churches realise that this actually happens to them? Do they see the judgements of Christ or just blunder on in blindness thinking that God is still with them? Sin is so deceitful that it blinds us completely on occasion. Also we are often willingly blind and deceit can become a way of life. I recalled the life of the missionary John Patton, who went to the New Hebrides in the South Pacific. He describes the natives deceit.

“Confessedly, however, it was uphill, weary and trying work. For one thing, these Tannese were terribly dishonest; and when there was any special sickness, or excitement from any cause, their bad feeling towards the Worship was displayed by the more insolent way in which they carried off whatever they could seize. When I opposed them, the club or tomahawk, the musket or Kiowa (killing stone), being instantly raised, intimated that my life would be taken, if I resisted.

Their skill in stealing on the sly was phenomenal. If an article fell, or was seen on the floor, a Tanna man would neatly cover it with his foot, while looking, you frankly in the face, and, having fixed it by his toes or by bending in his great toe like a thumb to hold it, would walk off with it, assuming the most innocent look in the world. In this way, a knife, a pair of scissors, or any smaller article, would at once disappear. Another fellow would deftly stick something out of sight amongst the whip cord plaits of his hair, another would conceal it underneath his naked arm, while, yet another would shamelessly lift what he coveted and openly carry it away.

With most of them, however, the shame was not in the theft, but in doing it so clumsily that they were discovered! Once, after continuous rain and a hot damp atmosphere, when the sun shone out I put my bed-clothes on a rope to dry. I stood at hand watching, as also the wives of two Teachers, for things were mysteriously disappearing almost

under our very eyes. Suddenly, Miaki, who with his wan companions had been watching us unobserved, came rushing to me breathless and alone, crying, "Missi, come in, quick, quick! I want to tell you something and to get your advice". He ran into my house, and I followed; but before he had got into his story, we heard the two women crying out, "Missi, Missi, come quickly Miaki's men are stealing your sheets and blankets" I ran at once, but all were gone into the bush, and with them my sheets and blankets."

As Patten observed, shame is not in the act but in being discovered. In other words, our concern is not with the sin or who has been sinned against but with how others will view us if found out. Also sin is so deceitful, that while we can see the sin in others, we cannot see the same sin in ourselves (The example of David's sin with Bathsheba is an example). People cloak their sin. The disguise for sin is unmasked by the law. *Rom 7:13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. Joh 15:22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.*

The recent police "Yewtree" operation that began to expose many media celebrities as sex offenders, has shocked some people as these "national treasures" were seen to have led other lives. They collected national honours, knighthoods and orders, and no one suspected anything untoward in their lives or if they did it was conveniently buried. The idea that somehow, popularity is linked with purity has been disproved. Yet it illustrates that the show can go on for many years without anyone suspecting that anything is wrong. The same can be true in the Churches.

Back in May of this year (part 34) we saw how the major denominations do not simply support homosexuality but also encourage it, denominations such as the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. How can they expect Christ blessing? Do you honestly think that the Holy Spirit would encourage Christ's new born Christians to attend those sort of places any more than spend an afternoon in a gay bar or a brothel? Ah you say, that is very hard on these well meaning people, surely they are not all like that? Well, I am told on good authority that the devil can appear quite angelic at times and that he leads his followers against the Christ. That is the meaning of anti-Christ.

The Tyatiran Church has within its serried ranks those who know satan personally. They are on good terms with the father of a lie. *Rev 2:24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan.* The Church at Thyatira is under threat because it openly tolerates these satanists and the satanic teaching of Jezebel. How marvellous to behold? How outspoken the sexual deviants are in our age and how silent the Churches of Christ. This silence acquiesces to the crimes. Shame on us all if we speak not.

Do you really believe that the Saviour would honestly want His dear children, his babes in Christ, to be cast into these nests of vipers? Places where the very image of marriage, Christ and the Church, is so wickedly caricatured. Where would you take a new believer? Ask

yourself? Also we should ask if we are fit to receive and nurture God's babies? And yet there are those who say they are Christians and pay men to undermine the gospel of Christ. They pay hirelings wages to sow the wages of sin among the beloved of Christ. Thieves that plunder the house of God. Why? Because we give them the keys of the house. It does not concern us to look at the map of the road to glory for ourselves. We are only too happy to trust blind guides. Let us ever question our route.

Let me state this quite categorically. If Churches do not hold to the moral teaching of the Bible, they are not the Christian Churches. You can stick what you like over the door but it doesn't make you a Church. Large numbers do not make you right. The Bereans were almost paranoid about getting the teaching right. *Act 17:11 These were the noblest of birth among them of Thessalonica, which received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.* (Bishops Bible). I cannot say that I have ever met a Church like that, where the members followed up on the teaching of Christ or have had much desire to learn for themselves. This is a reason as to how error can ease its way into the Churches.

The outcome is clear. *Rev 2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the Churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.* So you will see these error riddled Churches, dying on their feet as the living judgement permeates their squalid ranks. It is my belief also that as they decline we shall also see even more unbiblical ways adopted to try and stem the decline. Ichabod, the glory is departed from Israel, is writ large across these Churches. Religious decline is the consequence of religious adultery, just as homosexuality is the punishment for defiling God's image.

Our testimony

Part 52. *Rev 2:24* But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. *Rev 2:25* But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

You may not recall PP Bliss but you most probably have sung one of the 135 songs that he penned. On the 29th December 1876, Philip P Bliss and his wife were travelling in a train bound for Chicago, when at Ashtabula, Ohio, as they were passing over a bridge it collapsed, and the entire train was hurled into the river below and the carriages caught fire. Bliss, who before the accident had been reading his Bible and writing a new song, managed to escape through a window; but, discovering that his wife was still in the burning train, he rushed back to save her, and in trying to do so lost his own life at the age of 38 years. Their bodies were never found.

The night before that terrible railroad accident at Ashtabula, he said to his audience, "I may not pass this way again"; then he sang a solo, I'm Going Home Tomorrow. This indeed proved prophetic of his own home going. Philip P Bliss left a legacy of famous hymns amongst them this one.

PP was at a Sunday School meeting at Rockford, Illinois, with Major Whittle, at which the Major related the story of how, six years previously, during the American Civil War, the General of the Federal Army found himself in a fort with fifteen hundred men, completely surrounded by General French's forces. The situation appeared to be hopeless and the Federals were about to surrender, when signalling was observed from the top of a mountain some twenty miles away. It was a message from an army sent to their relief, and it read, "Hold the fort for I am coming, Sherman". Encouraged by the signal, the Federals held out for another three hours until General Sherman's troops arrived and the Confederates were forced to retreat. From this incident, Bliss quickly conceived the idea of a now famous hymn. And the next day at a Whittle and Bliss meeting in the Y.M.C.A. rooms at Chicago, he wrote the chorus on a black-board: **"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still; Wave the answer back to Heaven, "By Thy grace we will."**

So Christ waves to us and says hold fast, hang on, possess. But hold fast to what? What do you have to hold on to that is worth holding on to? I recall that as a religious unbeliever I had no understanding of the work of Christ in a man's life and certainly not in my own. I saw the externals of religion but had nothing of the internals. If you had asked me, "Mike, what is your testimony to the work of Christ in your life, what went on in you to make you become a Christian?" I would have been totally stumped. "What?" Testimony of what? I go to Church, isn't that enough? What more do you want?

I believe that each Christian should have a clear testimony of that meeting with Christ, that each Christian should be convicted of their personal sin, that each Christian should be confident of personal forgiveness, that each Christian be assured of eternal life in Jesus and should be in a living relationship with Jesus Christ. If you cannot put a testimony together that covers this, then my friends, I doubt very much if you have one. If you cannot bear witness to the work of Christ in your life, then I doubt that it has taken place. If you cannot account for hope you have no hope. Peter challenges us *1Pe 3:15 but sanctify the Lord the Christ in your hearts, and be always prepared to give **an answer** to every one that asks you to give an **account of the hope** that is in you, but with meekness and fear;*

I once had nothing in Christ. There was a time when I could not say that Christ had found me nor I Him, I could not say how my sin had been forgiven, I could not say how I had found a new life, how I had been born again, how heaven along with the scriptures had been opened to me. I could not say that, because it had not happened. All I could say was that I believed in a nebulous God and that I occasionally went to Church to show my allegiance. It was a totally dead faith. I was in a manner of speaking like that religious Pharisee Nicodemus. I would have my religion in the dark and come by night to Jesus but it wasn't in the light of day.

Nicodemus was a teacher in Israel and he did not understand the necessity of a new birth. He did not understand the condition of mankind. He did not understand that what we are now, cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven, that what we are is unfit for God's purpose. *Joh 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, Thou art the teacher of Israel and knowest not these things!* Here is a man who had spent his life in religion but did not understand the first thing about it.

Here was a man who should have known the new birth but he didn't. *Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* The New Birth is a teaching of the Old Testament not just the New Testament (Jesus is speaking in the Old Testament to an old testament teacher and member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus). The Old Testament taught about the need for cleansing and renewal of life in the heart of men but he did not know this.

Eze 18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? ...Eze 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked. Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Jim Elliot the missionary martyr killed by the Auca Indians in South America at the age of 28 years, said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose". Jim Elliot understood commitment. This is the essence of Life in Christ. Christ gets us to throw away this present rubbish to gain things which cannot be lost. *Mat 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. Joh 12:25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. Mar 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, Mar 10:30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

Mat 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: Mat 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

There, at that point, the meeting with Christ that we have things to hold fast to. Up to that meeting with Christ it was a time to throw away but now I have things to hold on to. The world will tell me, "Mike, get up to date, get a life, we live in an age that is adapting to change, we do not need those old time values, they were for the first century, things change". But Christ calls to me across the ages, from the Island of Patmos and says "Mike, hold on, hold fast, don't let things go, don't let things slip, keep what you have in tact until we meet again". "Mike, don't listen to those fools who have thrown away the truth, I don't change".

The Bible tells me that there are lots of things that I should be clinging to.

- *1Th 5:21 Prove all things; **hold fast** that which is **good**.*
- *Heb 3:6 But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we **hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end**.*
- *Heb 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us **hold fast our profession**.*

- *Heb 10:23 Let us **hold fast** the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)*

I am holding on to the profession or confession of life in Christ. I will be a witness for Him and my testimony will stand to that grace *Heb 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;* I will not get tossed about by life. *Heb 6:17 So when God wanted to prove for certain that his promise to his people could not be broken, he made a vow. Heb 6:18 God cannot tell lies! And so his promises and vows are two things that can never be changed. We have run to God for safety. Now his promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us. Heb 6:19 This **hope is like a firm and steady anchor for our souls.** In fact, hope reaches behind the curtain and **into the most holy place.** CEV*

We have an anchor, steadfast and sure. It anchors the umbilical, connecting this life to the next, earth to heaven, me to Christ. It reminded me of the dystrophin protein we looked at in our studies on genetics. The dystrophin gene is one of the longest human genes known, covering 2.2 megabases and takes 16 hours to copy. Dystrophin is a rod-shaped protein, and a vital part of a protein complex that connects the muscle fibre to the cell membrane. Dystrophin is like a coil in its structure and this allows it to act like a spring or shock absorber and it is like a cable that holds things together. If that cable fails, then the muscles don't work properly. The person dies.

We too have a living link to the holy place, not a dead connection but by a living connection. Its a **lifeline**. When Christ asks me to hold fast, it is not an impossible task. It is not beyond my capability because it is not beyond His capability. "Mike", He says, "Put the rope around you and tie it fast, it is unbreakable this end, you make sure you don't cut it your end".

When Jesus asks us here *Rev 2:25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. **Wave the answer back to Heaven, "By Thy grace we will."***

A strange reward?

Part 53. *Rev 2:26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: Rev 2:27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. AV **The translation can be improved.** Rev 2:26 *And he that overcomes, and he that keeps unto the end my works, to him will I give **authority** over the nations, Rev 2:27 and he shall **shepherd** them with an iron rod; as vessels of pottery are they broken in pieces, as I also have received from my Father;* Darby.*

Are you up to this task of exercising authority over the nations? Does it frighten you and disturb you or do you think that it is above you? Let me encourage you, that if Christ thinks that you and I can do it, we will do it. This may agitate the Methodist ladies sewing circle and flowers arrangers, along with many other genteel groups in Churches but we are in a war zone. We fight principalities and powers or have we forgotten that? Have we made an unwarranted peace with those whom we shall judge? Bear in mind will you, that this is a

reward for service. It is the privilege of the victors to destroy the enemy once and for eternity. *“ he that overcomes....to him will I give authority over the nations”*. You have in a manner of speaking, earned this right by overcoming and NO you cannot pass on it.

It must have come as a shock to the Thyatirans. They had tolerated Jezebel and her false teachings, they had been weak in the face of her corrupt practices, yet now they are being told that if they just overcome, they can exercise authority. They will exercise an authority that they had never exercised in their own Church? How gracious that Christ puts all that trust in them and us. Our failures do not undermine His success, they are our failures from which He allows us to recover, just like David. *1Ki 15:3 His (Abijam) heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father*. There is nothing held against us for our past as long as we hold our future in Jesus. That is Grace and that is Mercy. It should also lead us to reconsider what perfection is in the eyes of God.

Are you ready for this authority? It teaches us how important it is to keep a focus on reality. We shall exercise authority, yes, judgement over those who have spent a life rejecting Christ. It is a solemn duty. Before us will appear many of those we may have applauded and whose empty lives we have followed. The stars, the celebrities, the teams, the writers, the artists, the work colleagues, the neighbours, the ordinary people we pass every day, the teacher, the nurse, the doctors, the flight attendant, the policeman, the judge, the postman and so on goes our list. These people we see every day will stand before us in judgement. Have you ever thought how THEY will feel about us? That, here we are now and we didn't show them the slightest glimpse of Christ to help them avoid this? These we will judge.

I wondered whether some of Jesus compassion was motivated in part by this thought? *Mar 8:2 I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far*. Many of those that stood before Christ that day would stand before Him again. Many who were healed and not forgiven would do so too. There was for all of those who saw Christ, from the smallest to the greatest, another meeting to come. *Mat 26:63 ...And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothe*. Look at your fellow man as you pass him in the street and think of them in the light of them facing you in judgement and I think it will generate compassion.

I was led to a thought here about the witness of Jesus. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place where he was born, yet if as we believe, Jesus was the eternal God incarnate, the Creator of the Universe, why did He not try harder to compel people to enter the kingdom of God, pleading harder with the lost souls? Why in the burning building of life was He not pulling them out of the eternal flames? Plucking the brands from the fire. Why was the loving God, leaving men to die in their sin? The will of God is far more powerful than the will of man yet it does not appear to be deployed against all men.

You may say, well that is very unfair of God. Yet who are we to determine the fairness or otherwise of God's dealings down the ages. It wasn't "fair" that an innocent man should be crucified by the Romans but it was necessary to the purpose of God. *Heb 2:10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.* The cross was necessary to the purpose of God to perfect the Eternal Son through suffering and brings MANY sons to glory. Let us not also forget that the potter has supreme authority over the clay of life, *Rom 9:2of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?* It was to this purpose that Christ submitted Himself. It was in a sense a self-limitation of the Son of God. *Joh 5:30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*

Of those Jesus ministered to, such as the 10 lepers, He knew who would be in the Kingdom and who would not. Even knowing that, He does not push or hasten the ones who are to come in any open way, he does not turn up the Divine brightness. They must come by the Spirit. He does not call after the 10 lepers "Have you forgotten something? Shouldn't you be coming back to glorify God and seek salvation?" Of the 10 lepers, only one returned and only ONE was saved. *Luk 17:19 And he saide vnto him, Arise, goe thy way, thy faith hath saved thee.* Geneva. How many others received healing without salvation. Made well in this life, only to perish in the next. Saving faith expresses itself in the joyful gratitude and a return to God. *Luk 7:50 And he said to the woman (who anointed Him with the precious ointment), Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.* She was a grateful sinner.

We too have to learn to trust the Father in His dealings with men and take the sadness that it often generates. The sadness of rejection. *Mar 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.* May we too be given the same heart of wisdom to accept, that the goodness we would give to our fellow men, does not automatically result in their eternal salvation. We are not going to save everyone but everyone who is going to be saved will be saved. None will be lost.

Was Jesus an effective preacher? Was He persuasive? Yes. Could a man, say Spurgeon or Whitfield be a better preacher than Jesus? The answer must be that they could not, for if Jesus spoke through them they could not speak more powerfully. How ever well they spoke, without Jesus its nothing.

To return. Judging is considered by many to be very unchristian. There are those who say that you shouldn't judge people because its plain wrong. Yet I never found this in my Bible. It does not say that I should not make judgements. It says that I must **NOT** make judgements in things that I am wrong in, because I will find myself under judgement. *Mat 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged (κρίνω krinoo).* A judgement is a crisis and a crisis is a point of decision making or a point of judgement. We are designed to make judgements. We make judgements about risk when we are out driving, we make judgements about value for money and quality when shopping, we make judgements about individual character when doing business and if we are

wise, we make judgements about our morality. I say again we are designed to make judgements. We have a logical faculty.

In fact our lives of necessity need judgement to survive. Society needs judgement to survive for without law nations perish. God has placed in all creatures the ability to make judgements to survive, yet so many times that is overridden by sin that dwells in us, that it works to destroy us. To work well, we need to judge between good and evil and that is discernment. *Heb 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern (διάκρισις diakrisis) both good and evil.* If we made a greater effort in self-judgement, we would avoid the Divine judgements *1Co 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. **Judging is necessary.***

How do we judge in eternity? Do we sit as judges at a bench and pronounce over the sins of men and they pass before us and commend them into the eternal darkness of hell. A production line for the damned? There is an indication that when believers die they awake in glory and that when sinners die, they awake in Hell **already**, *Luk 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* They have in a manner speaking been judged and are already condemned. They died in Adam and with Adam's sin. With no faith in Christ, they are judged already. *Joh 3:18 He that believes on him is not judged: but he that believes not **has been already judged**, because he has not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God.* What purpose would a trial hold?

The appearance before Christ is to reveal the works of men, it is the time of reckoning and settling of accounts. It is the Cosmic payday. *2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat (βῆμα bema = **step or dais**) of Christ; that every one may receive the **things done in his body**, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.....Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, **according to their works.*** In that judgement we may stand as witnesses for Christ of the evil that we seen in **our generations**. In that sense we judge the world.

If we bear this fact of judgement in mind, it might just, might just, make us more serious in dealing with those about us. *1Co 6:2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?* It is almost as if Paul is saying to the Corinthians, "look, we have far more important things to do than argue about life's trivia, let the kids deal with this". *1Co 6:4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the Church.*

Sometimes we lose sight of both the great privilege of rank that is bestowed upon us (*Rev 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father*) and the great task to judge with Christ the nations. *Dan 7:18 But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.* This is given to us through Christ's victory. *Psa 2:6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the*

LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

How do you see the everlasting life? One long Church service? One everlasting chorus? One Great sermon stretching into the ages? Everlasting clapping, everlasting hymns? Everlasting inactivity in an everlasting paradise where everything is done everlastingly for you? Well, we may be wrong to think that. We firstly go through an awards ceremony which bestows the gifts of the Churches that overcome. Do we accumulate all of the rewards listed for each of the 7 Churches? I do not see why not. They are for overcomers.

Then we start by being put to work judging the world and the angels. Then, there are the responsibilities that come with the rewards of our service, the rewards for the talents used *Mat 25:23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.* I do not believe that the parable of the talents is just about what we do here, its about what we do there.

There are rewards for us to use *1Co 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.* There are places for us to dwell in *Joh 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* There are things to receive beyond imagination *Isa 64:4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.* Heaven is not the great retirement home in the sky where old and weary Christians relax for eternity. New life brings with it new worlds, new possibilities and new activities. *Rev 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.* We shall continue to glorify God by our actions not just by our words..

How many times have you had conversations about heaven with people? Not many I guess. Have you discussed what we do? Yet I have found a huge preoccupation among Christians about the "end times", the "second coming" and whether the Jewish nation gets restored. *Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.* Yet we spend so much time debating things that it is not for us to know. We see so many divisions caused by prophetic guessing. We are side tracked from the glory to come and the glory in Christ. Do you honestly think that when I die and go to glory, that I will be bothered whether it is a-millennial, pre-millennial or post-millennial second coming. That it will be important whether Israel is or is not restored as a nation? I think not. What will be important is that glorious future in Christ. Like Christ *Heb 12:2who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,* we too should be looking forward not down and certainly not backwards.

The order of the Morning Star

Part 54. Rev 2:28 And I will give him the morning star.

This is an extract from a letter to the father of Noel Chavasse on 29th September 1917.

“I signed something last night which gave me the most mixed feelings of deep regret and great pleasure and that was the submission to His Majesty that a Bar should be granted to the Victoria Cross gained by your son. There is no doubt whatsoever that this will be approved and while it cannot in any way diminish your sorrow, still from the point of view of those who are your friends, it is a great pleasure to think that your son in laying down his life laid it down on behalf of his fellow countrymen, and that it is recognized, not only by those who knew him, but by the King and Country as a whole. In all the records of Victoria Crosses given I do not think there is one that will appeal to the British Public more than the record for which this Bar is to be given, and as I said at the beginning of my letter, it was a great pleasure to think that this recognition of his services is thus recorded.”

The award was announced in the London Gazette on 14th September, 1917. It read:

“Though severely wounded early in the action whilst carrying a wounded soldier to the dressing station, he refused to leave his post, and for two days, not only continued to perform his duties, but in addition, went out repeatedly under heavy fire to search for and attend to the wounded who were lying out. During these searches, although practically without food during this period, worn with fatigue and faint with his wound, he assisted to carry a number of badly wounded men over heavy and difficult ground. By his extraordinary energy and inspiring example was instrumental in rescuing many wounded who would have otherwise undoubtedly succumbed under the bad weather conditions. This devoted and gallant officer subsequently died of his wounds”. His Father, the Bishop of Liverpool (successor to JC Ryle) wrote, “What should we do in such sorrow as this, if we could not rest on the character of God, on his love, and wisdom and righteousness...”

Now the reason that I read that was to make a point. There is a big difference between a “medal” and a “decoration”. Medals are given to people who have been in a particular place or battle. A medal is “for being there”. A decoration is an award for a particular act of bravery above and beyond the call of duty. Noel Chavasse in his brief life picked up two Victoria Crosses and the Military Cross. He being a committed Christian, I would like to think that he has been awarded the “Morning star” which will outshine all the other great honours.

There are many in Churches who think that they are worthy of decorations because they have done many wonderful things. In reality they were just there, attendees upon religion, not Christ. They will go so far as to say that when we did our wonderful things, we did it in Jesus Name. Let me tell you, Jesus Name is not a magic formula that legitimises our works before

God. There is a world of difference between **asking** in Jesus Name and **doing** in Jesus Name. *Joh 14:1 And whatsoever ye shall **ASK** in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Mat 7:2 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and **IN THY NAME DONE** many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.* Some war memorials have a stone engraved with "**Known unto God**", when there is a body buried with no means of identification. We have a tomb in Westminster to the unknown warrior. This response to those "wonderful workers" is different. This is the memorial to the unknown do-gooders. **Unknown** unto God.

You will see that what matters is whether we act to obey God's will. *Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but **he that doeth the will** of my Father which is in heaven.* A topical example of this is the christening of Prince George. According to the Anglican rites they "baptize thee **in the Name** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Later they conclude "SEEING now, dearly beloved brethren, that this Child is **regenerate** and grafted into the body of Christ's Church". This baptismal regeneration finds no support from God's word for its origin, yet it is done **in Jesus Name**.

It must logically follow that if water is splashed on the unwary and unaware, in order to secure regeneration, then of necessity to be successful, we need to evangelise with a hosepipe. Such madness is perfectly consistent with the practice of the Mormons, baptising the dead. Those Mormons who practice this rite view baptism as an indispensable requirement to enter the Kingdom of God, and thus practice Baptism for the Dead to give those who have died without ever having had the opportunity to receive baptism the opportunity to receive it by proxy. The LDS Church teaches that those who have died may choose to accept or reject the baptism done on their behalf. How the dead do this is not made clear. One knock for yes?

It is by keeping the Word of God to the end that we get the decoration. It is through diligently seeking to confirm our duty before Him that we overcome. Whatever else and what other falsehood is strewn in our way is to be avoided. Because things have a nice warm feel about them, feel good religion, doesn't make them right. Because you think it's a nice thing to do doesn't make it right. Good is not defined by us but ultimately by God. *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.* So how do you know if some idea or some whim you encounter might just be from the Lord. You start by seeking to know the will of God in the situation and then by seeking the grace to do it.

Was not this the meaning of the Phylactery? *Deu 6:6 And these words,Deu 6:8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.* Phylactery comes from a word meaning to guard. To Guard what? The scriptures, bound to the hand reminded the individual to examine what he touched. Could he pollute the word of God by letting it touch something unclean, something immoral? In other words, the phylactery was a reminder of ones duty to God. As with many things it became a religious object symbolising outward piety while disguising the inward corruption. *Mat 23:5 But all their works they do for*

to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments. God does not want religious show.

What is the significance of the Morning Star? The morning star is the last star (sometimes a bright planet) visible in the night sky that heralds the dawn of the new day. It is in a sense the precursor of the light and the rising sun. How is this important to us Christians? Let us remind ourselves about the state of the world that we live in. *1Jn 5:19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Joh 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. We live in a world that is black.*

The cosmos did not spring into existence in a blaze of light but **silently** in a cloud of darkness. There was no big bang for there is no sound in space and there was no big flash of light either. *Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.* God switched the lights on after it was created. Now when we say “light” we are looking at a part of the spectrum that we are created to observe. There are things that we could “see” differently in other parts of the electromagnetic spectrum were we so equipped. God must “see” across the whole spectrum.

What purpose does light serve? It brings definition, shape and meaning to the things that exist. The same is true when we look at the spiritual condition of the cosmos in the light that Christ brings to it.

Joh 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Susan Warner said it neatly: Jesus bids us shine, Then, for all around, Many kinds of darkness, In this world are found - Sin, and want, and sorrow; So we must shine, You in your small corner, And I in mine. Christ and the Christians are light bringers, bringers of meaning, illuminators of form, to a world where darkness is on the face of the depths of sin.

Christ’s light brings things into sharp relief as to what we are and what we are doing here. Paul describes the man walking in the darkness of sin until the light of God’s word flashes upon him. *Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.* This is the real world in which we live and fight, the light battling against the darkness, the “many kinds of darkness” that are found in this world.

If a person claims to be in Christ and has no sense of this darkness, no horror of great darkness, no repulsion against it, no conflict with it, then he must question his world view. It is not the view taught by scripture and it is not the view held by the Master. Can we cry out with

the martyrs of Christ? *Rev 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, **How long, O Lord, holy and true,** dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? Or do we just sit in league with the darkness, having made friends and companions with its residents?*

To those of us who are troubled in this world of darkness, Christ makes a promise to the overcomer, **“I will give him the Morning Star”**. I will give to you that promise of the new day dawning, the new era in a new heaven and a new earth. A new universe where darkness has no place and light shines eternal. *Rev 21:23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* Now that morning star is Christ Himself. *Rev 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.* I would suggest that it is held before us as a promise and incentive to overcome. It is both a promise and a reward.

A reason men strive for victory is to get the award. *Heb 12:2.....who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.* It is something that we look to and beyond. It is to remind us of the joy to come when darkness fades forever into the eternal light of Christ.

Sardis the Living Dead

Part 55. *Rev 3:1 And unto the angel of the Church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead (νεκρός nekros = corpses).*

Necrosis is also a medical term that describes cell damage or death due to infections or injury. Gangrene is a typical example and with that idea of death comes corruption. This Church of Sardis is suffering from necrosis. The term “dead” may refer to physical death or spiritual death. *Mat 8:22 But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.* Sardis is spiritually dead and instead of being a beacon of light to those around, this Church has become a Necropolis, a city of the dead. *Mat 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

Now this Church has a reputation that it is alive. *Rev 3:1 You are known for being alive, but you are dead. GW.* They are to all intents and purposes outwardly, a lively Church. They have “activities” or works which are well known. If you went into this Church, it would not necessarily be full of aged people, shuffling around singing ancient hymns and having a formal style of worship. No, they could be dancing and singing and clapping and praying with all the joy and liveliness that you could imagine. That would fit the bill for an outwardly alive Church. This leads me to consider whether you can draw any conclusions from the outward manifestations of a Church?

Come with me in your minds eye and look at the Churches you know. Strip away the building, the solemn fabric, the layout, the chairs and the windows and look at the people as they come together. Do you see any real difference now? Just a group of worshippers? Its no wonder that people draw this happy comparison that when it comes down to it, that we are all believers at heart who just have different styles and we can all fit in together.

Really? Is that so? Let us remind ourselves that the outward appearance is not all that there is to see in God's eyes. *1Sa 16:6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for **the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*** God looks much deeper into our lives.

How many people just go to Church? By that I mean, for how many people, is their religion just limited to Church attendance? From Sunday to Sunday, in that gap between meetings, is there any personal interest in Christ? Is there any thought of Him, building the relationship, fellowship, reading the Bible with purpose, desiring opportunity to serve Him, engaging in prayer with Him? If there is no enthusiasm in our lives for Christ outside of gatherings, no drive to pursue Him in private, then what is in our lives? Can we possibly say that this is what is expected of an **Overcomer**?

The young are particularly prone to this, as are those hidden in large congregations. There is the feeling that there are things going on, a religious life around them, and that just being there in the midst of that, is what it is all about. Wrong! You cannot have a Christian life by Church osmosis, that is, by letting other people's experiences and practices, drift across into your life, unless it is coming in from Christ.

No doubt we could cause great embarrassment in Churches if we asked people to spontaneously give their testimony of Christ's saving grace. "No" they would say, that is unfair to spring it on us, or I am too shy to speak out in public. Well, is there any other person who could give your testimony for you? Now here is a thing. If at this point you have a problem, let me say that you have a really big problem. If you cannot give a reason for your faith, what faith do you have? *1Pe 3:15 But dedicate your lives to Christ as Lord. **Always be ready to defend your confidence in God** when anyone asks you to explain it. However, make your defence with gentleness and respect.* GW. it may be translated "**Forever have to hand**". You see, we have crossed over from the mere outward expression of faith to the experiential nature of our faith. If we cannot cry "Abba, Father" where are we?

How would you feel if someone knocked on the door and said that as a Church, we were "dead". Would it worry us or would we dismiss them as a crank? Reformers are not liked. Jonathan Edwards, the New England contemporary of George Whitfield, fell into disfavour with his Church and area ministers in 1748. He called for stricter requirements on receiving communion. Edwards believed too many hypocrites and unbelievers were being accepted into Church membership and developed a rigid screening process. The controversy boiled over into Edwards' dismissal from the Northampton Church in 1750. Now I don't agree with his views on

membership but I do agree with his challenge to the religious hypocrisy of his day. We have had similar experiences.

12th July 1993. "...it is quite clear to me that if the body as a whole is unprepared to act, this will issue in the **complete disintegration** of the Wooden Hill fellowship. I cannot continue to go along with a fellowship that is unprepared to make any Biblical decisions and come to definitive conclusions. A group with no commitment to principle and practice is doomed from the outset". **The Churches of Revelation are not victims**, however, they are willing conspirators. None of the 7 Churches are victims.

So what is wrong with the Church at Sardis? There are three issues for them.

1. Their works were **unfulfilled** πληρώω pleroou
2. Their witness was **polluted** μολύνω molunoo
3. They were lacking **awareness** γρηγορεύω gregoriu

There were things lacking in their personal Christian lives. Their world was where things are in a disordered mess. They have a lot still to learn and so I must ask whether they had been disciplined? A disciple is a learner" (from manthano, "to learn," from a root math---, indicating thought accompanied by endeavour Vines Exp.).

Were these Sardians disciples? Whatever happened to discipleship? Discipleship was a key plank of the Gospel *Mat 28:19 So wherever you go, **make disciples** of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you. Act 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied. Most Churches just stop at baptism, if that and accept that if someone has "believed" they can find their own way from there onwards. A diet of sing songs, sermons and daily notes will suffice to grow them? Not so. You try living off a diet of coca cola and see if you can thrive.*

I can tell you, I was never disciplined and I know few who were. Its no wonder that left to ourselves the Churches are in a state of weakness, souls growing like twisted vines if they grow at all. Whereas they should be like vines planted in neat agreeable order. They should become, in time, like the one who is discipling them, as we grow into the image of Christ. I will call this "**active**" Church membership as opposed to "**passive**" Church membership.

Active membership is where believers grow and begin to contribute to the life of the Church, begin to develop and exercise their gifts to edify others. Active membership is the outcome of *Eph 4:11 It was he who "gave gifts to people"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. GNB. I think that we live in a time of mass evangelism because individuals are incapable of witnessing their faith. The early gospel spread like contagion between people.*

Passive membership is where people roll up from week to week having spent little or no time in Christian activity of their own making and draw upon the activities of others. They are little

different to corpses, wheeled out on Sundays for a little reviving. This is who Christ addresses at Sardis and anywhere else this is happening and I imagine its happening on a large scale in these days. I had a thought that if religious interest is limited to a service of say 2 hours a week, that is about 1 per cent of our life. People often go on about tithing money but how about tithing time to Christ? That would change the face of modern Christianity entirely. That would be about 3 hours a day in the things of Christ and don't complain! Just spending 30 minutes a day in the Bible would transform people. Just think how many people would be bursting with things to share, it would transform the ministry?

Do we really want to be in heaven and spend time with Christ forever? If we really want to do it all the time and forever in the life to come shouldn't we be spending more time now?

So how long should we go on discipling people and how should we do it? I think that discipling requires far closer contact with the teacher than just in public services. Take Jesus disciples. They were in close contact almost daily for a period of nearly 3 years. At the end of that time they were capable of taking the Gospel to the world. They didn't need 10 years or 20 years sitting in a synagogue to make the transformation. 3 years in Ephesus was sufficient. *Act 20:31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.* It was enough time to grow people who were committed. It was just one year in Antioch. *Act 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*

It seems to me that discipling is quite intensive. It builds very quickly on the conversion experience to establish the individual in the new life of Christ. It is similar to the idea encapsulated in the saying. "Give me a child for his first seven years and I'll give you the man". Leave discipleship too late and we will find other thoughts taking root which undermine the true faith and create a caricature of Christ and Christianity. Its never too late to disciple but the later it is left, there is more to clear out before you can build.

If a handful of unlearned smelly old fishermen, a tax collector, political activists and some relatives could be so disciplined by being with Jesus that they changed the world, it should raise the bar as to what we can do. *Act 4:13 After they found out that Peter and John had no education or special training, they were surprised to see how boldly they spoke. They realized that these men had been with Jesus. GW.*

I want to leave you to consider this thought. **Do you consider that you are making progress in your Christian life or are you just coasting and if so what is holding you back?**

Sloppy Church

Part 56. Rev 3:1 And unto the angel of the Church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead (νεκρός corpses).

I continue with our thoughts on the necessity of discipleship. I believe that the lack of discipleship has created a two tier Church. There are those who are fully committed and those who trail in their wake. Those who are fully committed end up with a leadership role and those who follow become the congregation. It's a bit like the JW's who have a 144,000 who are going to heaven and the rest marooned on a new earth. This idea may arise from the statements of scripture about Church leadership.

Forget about messy Church, **welcome to Sloppy Church**. Sloppy Church welcomes everyone (and their collection money) but makes little effort to grow or elevate members. It hopes by throwing copious amounts of scriptural manure on them week after week, they will grow. As we noted last time, this is passive growth. I have noted that it is one of humanities characteristics, that if something is free and requires little effort to obtain, we are happy to take advantage of it.

Now I return to that thought of "active" and "passive" Church membership. Let us examine the following passage: *1Ti 3:1 It is true that anyone **who desires** to be a Church official (overseer/bishop) wants to be something worthwhile. That's why officials must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. They must be self-controlled, sensible, well-behaved, friendly to strangers, and able to teach. They must not be heavy drinkers or troublemakers. Instead, they must be kind and gentle and not love money. officials must be in control of their own families, and they must see that their children are obedient and always respectful. If they don't know how to control their own families, how can they look after God's people? CEV*

Notice firstly that serving the body of Christ arises from a **desire to serve**. While I am sure God stirs the heart, it must also be true that we too stir our hearts to serve. A so called vocation, is in part self-generated. It is, as the word in the text suggests, something that we stretch out for or reach for. I think that it is also something that we should encourage in the Church as part of discipleship and personal development. Yet, when many people feel a stirring to serve, they are funnelled into a seminary or Bible college. They are separated from the congregation. Here is an example of the Methodists procedure, from their own publication..

"Candidates must have the necessary quality of mind and intellectual capacity to undertake satisfactorily a course of preparation for ministry, including theological, biblical and mission studies, and to be able to cope with the demands of ministry and appreciate the significance of theology to the Church." Paul to the contrary, however, does not suggest to Timothy that he go to some educational establishment to prepare for oversight. What is one of the first requirements? It is **a wife**. Training if it exists at all is done in the family because *1Ti 3:5 For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?*

If we adopted these standards, then we would not have had single men like the so called Rev. Flowers, who hit the headlines this week as the incompetent head of the Coop Bank, user of horse tranquilisers (ketamine) and homosexualist, getting oversight in the first place and causing damage to the Name of Christ, attracting headlines such as "porn again Christian" and "crystal Methodist". The requirements Paul outlines do not included the abomination of

homosexualists. Strange though how “Christians” are singled out and no such headlines applied to muslims. Yet all can be forgiven.

I am never sure how people define their “call to the ministry”. Many of the so called “reformed” teaching groups who have rejected the supernatural gifts in today’s Church still find enough space to allow themselves a sliver of hope that God actually does speak to them on this issue. Yet it seems to me that they are more likely to use providence as a divine oui-ja board to confirm their so called calling. Not for them, the spirit of God calling in a dream to “come over to Macedonia and help us”. How on earth these people arrive at the conclusion that they should become a leader in the Moreton-on-the-Marsh Baptist Church beats me?

I am labouring the point that we have made so many times before and that is, that congregations develop their own leaders and train their own leaders and encourage their own leaders. If there are teachers in the Church, they are capable of instructing without the resort to external training establishments. Men like C H Spurgeon were self-taught having from an early age avidly read his way through his grandfathers theological library. Why should that be unique? The Church is a family. It is not natural to import fathers and mothers into a family and it is not natural to import overseers and pastors into the Church. Why does this happen? I suggest that it is another consequence of the failure to disciple within the congregation and it is put outside the congregation. **It is outsourced.**

My next point is, “**do the moral requirements of the overseer or Church official AND his wife, as this version (1Tim3v1) puts it, ONLY apply to those seeking office?**” Drilling down into this text, I am asking whether men and women, fathers and mothers are allowed to adopt lower standards if they are not seeking office. That they do not have to be faithful in marriage, that they do not have to exercise self-control, that they can be boozers whose children can run riot and be rude? In other words, can we display a high moral standard in the Church and at the same time accept a lower standard in the home? I think the argument is obvious, we must have a single standard and a high standard.

If eventually, everyone aspired and became an elder and overseer in the Church, what a wonderful Church that would be? I accept that some are still growing and may be younger and less well educated in the faith but it is our duty to bring everyone up into the unity of the faith *Eph 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:* However, I return to the point that every Christian has a duty to show the working of the grace of God in his own home. Note this. I am saying that every Christian’s home should be a Church. A family Church.

If a person cannot open his own house as a Church, cannot behave and demand the behaviour in his own home, as is expected in a Church meeting, what hypocrisy is going on? On the one hand he is happy to congregate with other Christians but at the same time, keep that separate from how he congregates in his own home, keeping the standards of the home below the standards in the body.

The Church is merely the home, the family, on a larger scale. It holds the **same standards**. Let me go a step further. If the Church has problem with lazy people, it is told to discipline them. *2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we **commanded** you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.* Nay, Paul **commands** them. So when we deal with children in the home who refuse to assist or contribute, do we deal the same hand? Why not? You see, this highlights another interesting attitude. Parents seem prepared to have one action in the larger congregation and another action in the smaller, the home congregation. Whatever should apply in the Church should apply in the home. That is probably why the world calls Christians hypocrites, because we hold variable standards. If that is so they are right.

Another example of what should apply in the Church, should apply in the home, is this. I have come across many examples of sponsored fornication, home condoned fornication. This is where Christian parents continue to provide upkeep for their fornicating offspring as if nothing was going on. They have some mental block about this. They would preach against it in a Congregation but outside of this larger Church meeting, they let it pass, they just accept it.

They cannot bring themselves to deliver a person to satan for the destruction of the flesh or excommunicate them from the family. Let me tell you, if they don't do it God will, for sure. *1Co 5:11 Now, what I meant was that **you should not associate** with people who call themselves brothers or sisters in the Christian faith but live in sexual sin, are greedy, worship false gods, use abusive language, get drunk, or are dishonest. Don't eat with such people. After all, do I have any business judging those who are outside the Christian faith? **Isn't it your business to judge those who are inside?** GW*

Eli the High priest had offspring who did not respect God and Eli let his family get away with it. He put them above God and it cost him everything. *1Sa 3:13 **He knew that his sons refused to respect me**, and he let them get away with it, even though I said I would punish his family forever. I warned Eli that sacrifices or offerings could never make things right! His family has done too many disgusting things.* CEV. What an indictment. He knew and, he knew that God knew, but still he did nothing. Stubborn to the end and it killed him. God had declared war on Eli's family and it went on for generations. *1Ki 2:27 So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD; that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.* It was still going on 100 years after Eli's death. What a legacy he left his descendents. I wonder how many things that happen to people are a **consequence** of behaviour set in motion by our godlessness ancestors, generations ago?

That leads me to yet another consideration. Would you give property that belonged to the body of Christ to unbelievers? It is another test of where we stand. Many Christians leave their wealth to their unbelieving offspring. The natural family is given priority over the spiritual family. You may say well that is unkind. I will reply, why should I give the Lord's resources to sponsor the kingdom of satan. People may share chemical DNA but the DNA of God's family is of a far higher order and importance. This is what Jesus says on the subject. *Mat 12:48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, **Who** is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!* That is why I shall leave nothing to unbelievers. God has removed my natural family from me

and grafted me into the tree of life. I have a family make no mistake. Let us ask ourselves again, who are our eternal family? Do we believe this?

There is great concern in our day and age about green issues, about polluting the natural environment, climate, dumping toxic waste and other poisons. Yet the same politicians and leaders do not give a care for the moral pollution of the people. The filth and mess in the lives of men and women is acceptable and something which they are prepared to accept and live with. Not so God Himself. It is totally unacceptable. We in the Churches have begun to accept these values and it takes me back to a time in our ancient history (we are Israelites) when temple became a storage place for other beliefs.

Since the time Solomon began to compromise the faith, both in his family and the nation, successive generations had accumulated the filth. Little by little, generation after generation, they hauled the pagan worship into the sanctuary and hallowed it. They even made a new altar for sacrifice like the one they saw in Damascus and set it up in the Temple and relegated God's altar to prayer. *2Ki 16:14 But he (King Ahaz) moved the bronze altar dedicated to the LORD. It had been in front of the temple between his altar and the LORD'S temple. Ahaz put it on the north side of his altar. King Ahaz gave this command to the priest Urijah: "On this great altar you must burn the morning burnt offerings and the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offerings and grain offerings, and the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and wine offerings of all the people of the land. Sprinkle all the blood of the burnt offerings and other sacrifices on it. I will use the bronze altar for prayer."*

Do you see what they did? They replaced God's sacrificial altar with prayer altar. That's how you might get the idea that prayer is enough to relate you to God without divine sacrifice. You can switch all the priorities and still think everything is nice in the garden. Well, it took a strong and great reformer named Josiah, who began the clear out. *2Ki 23:4 Then the king ordered the chief priest Hilkiah, the priests who served under Hilkiah, and the doorkeepers to take out of the LORD'S temple all the utensils that had been made for Baal, Asherah, and the entire army of heaven. Josiah burned the utensils outside Jerusalem in an open field near the Kidron Brook. Then he carried their ashes to Bethel.*

Josiah was a great King. *2Ki 23:24 Josiah also got rid of the mediums, psychics, family idols, other idols, and disgusting gods that could be seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. He did this to confirm the words of the Teachings written in the book that the priest Hilkiah found in the LORD'S temple. No king before Josiah had turned to the LORD with all his heart, soul, and strength, as directed in Moses' Teachings. No other king was like Josiah. GW Yet you will see that despite this godly king's heroic efforts, it came too late for the nation. For Josiah 2Ki 22:20 That is why I'm going to bring you to your ancestors. I'm going to bring you to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see any of the disaster I'm going to bring on this place.'" So they reported this to the king. GW.*

So what have we concluded? That the Church extends far beyond a Sunday meeting. At its core is the relationship between a husband and wife (Christ and the Church). If this is a caricature it spreads throughout the congregation. Then, the home in which the husband and

wife live is a Church, where children should be brought up in Christ and that the discipline applied in the wider congregation is also applied in the home. We have also seen that there can only be one standard of morality and order in all spheres of our lives. You see, we can walk around like the Sardians in polluted garments possibly without even being conscious of it. We can wear the garments of righteousness, covered in compromise and not even be aware.

Because we moved Church out of the home and into a purpose built shed which we then called "the Church", we were able to develop two sets of behaviour. One for the Church meeting and one for the home. If we move Church back into the home, instead of a 2 hour Church, we shall have a 168 hour Church and we shall have a continuously operating place of worship. We shall as a result have to rethink our behaviour and we shall have to apply godly discipline.

Every day Adventists

Part 57. Rev 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. (Advent Sunday 1st Dec 2013).

I found it a strange thing that men are holding commemorations for the start of World War One rather than the end of the war to end all wars. It seems that we have a propensity for looking backwards rather than forwards, a bit like Lot's wife and that carries consequences. Again as we approach the Christmas season or Winterval as the jelly legged hail-fellow-well-met brigade call it, people and Churches cast back to the Palestinian village of Bethlehem and the birth of the Messiah. This nostalgic look at the Christian religion has of course nothing to do with anything Jesus asked of us. It is an annual commercial rip off to prey on the feeble minded. As Ebenezer Scrooge said, "A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!"

Jesus asked us to watch what was coming and even the memorial of His death was to be celebrated with a forward look *1Co 11:26....you are telling others about the Lord's death until he comes again*. Why watch? *Luk 12:39 And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for **the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not***. The foolish virgins suffered the consequences of their lack of preparedness. The one hour you weren't watching.

The founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, originated "watch night" services in 1740, sometimes calling them Covenant Renewal Services. This idea was borrowed from the Moravian Christians. The services provided Methodist Christians with a godly alternative to times of drunken revelry, such as Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. I am sure that many Churchgoers would far prefer to party on, than attend a time of reflection on the past year and hopes for that to come. If that is so it perhaps shows that a spirit of watchfulness is low on the agenda in their lives.

Watchfulness is lacking in the Church at Sardis. They are not Adventists, which by definition is a member of any of various Christian sects emphasizing belief in the imminent second coming of Christ (Advent in Churches looks to first coming). The early Church was very focused on the return of Christ and the coming of the Lord because that day ushered in the new heavens and earth and the consummation of God's kingdom. *Jas 5:8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Php 3:20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*

The warning to the Sardians that Christ will come as a thief is not then just a message for them. It is a message for all Churches and a message for the world. *1Th 5:4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. Tit 2:12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

Now there are two possibilities for Christians. The **first possibility** is, that Christ will come suddenly as a thief, in the clouds and the world will end. *2Pe 3:12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

The second possibility is that we will die and Christ will have come for us. So in a sense, this view of the advent encourages us to prepare to leave this world. It is not a popular topic but it is one we should face. Our lives should be lived such that we are not surprised by Christ's sudden coming for us.

I have talked to many Christians about whether they are ready at this moment to go to Christ. While many want the benefits of Christ, far less are ready to be off, there and then into His presence. This life holds them in its vice like jaws and they love it. People who get sick start to worry about the short time they have left instead of rejoicing. People create bucket lists of things they want to do before they quit life. Remember our ministry back in August, "Don't let yourself get attached to anything you are not willing to walk out on in 30 seconds flat"? Are we packed and ready or are there more pressing things to deal with here that would distract us?

I can remember the excitement, as a child, when relatives would come and visit. I suppose it had something to do with the expectation of receiving something from them. I would go out and stand outside the train station for ages, waiting for their arrival. Then I would see them and run to them delighted at their appearing. I hope that I have the same attitude to my Lord. I remind myself that He is on His way and His visit will not be a surprise but a joyful reunion. How embarrassed we will be if we are taken by surprise? How many will say, "Oooh, you are a bit early aren't you?" when they should be thinking, "Oh, you are delayed, please hurry up".

There is then a general second coming, when Christ appears to all but suddenly and without warning as a thief and a more imminent coming in the hour of our departure from life. Either way, we must be watching. It is part of our faith to be watchers for Christ. We also need to know the signs of the times like the men of Issachar. *1Ch 12:32 And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.* They were the eyes of the Church. *Mat 16:3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

Our Lord informs us that the end times will be like the times of Noah. People going about their business, having a meal in a restaurant, getting married, living life, then **BANG**, the skies opened up. *Mat 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* Yet this was not an arbitrary attack on humanity, it was consequential to man's behaviour. It was his just deserts. *Gen 6:5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it **grieved him at his heart.*** I ask us, are we in harmony with God's feelings? Does the way of the world grieve us or excite us?

Does the evil of our age sit comfortably with us, can we live with it or do we loathe it? If we live comfortably with it and it sits comfortably with us, it will lull us into a slumber that will miss the signs of the times. We shall no more be Adventists and we shall not be prepared to meet our God.

The silent killer

Part 58. *Rev 3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee **as a thief**, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*

Christ describes His approach to those not watching as being like a thief. Now there is a difference between a thief and a robber. Jesus knew about thieves and robbers because he was crucified with two thieves and was substituted for a robber Barabbas. Thieves and robbers differ in this. Robbers do not appear concerned who sees them commit an offence but a thief aims to remain undetected. *Hos 7:1 "Whenever I want to heal Israel, all I can see is Ephraim's sin and Samaria's wickedness. People cheat each other. They break into houses and steal. They rob people in the streets.* The robber is brazen, in the open, the thief works in secret and in the night where he cannot be detected. The thief is stealthy. God has also been stealthy in the past as in Noah's day.

Now for a character who is supposed to be a fiction, Noah has a lot of scripture dedicated to him. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Matthew, Luke, Peter and the writer of Hebrews mention him. Matthew and Luke record Jesus comments on him as a real person in a real historical event. Noah

however, is more than a man for his own time, he is a man for all seasons and in particular for our time. Peter makes some key comments on his day and relates them to us. *1Pe 3:20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a **preparing**, wherein **few**, that is, **eight souls** were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save us** (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*

It is not my purpose today to expound this verse in detail but I will mention in passing this.

1. Noah was a **prepared man**. He was anticipating the judgement and made steps to avoid it. He found refuge in Christ and was hidden from the storm. His faith could be seen in the life he lived and what he was building could be seen by all.
2. **Few are saved**. Many may be called but few are chosen. This alone should spur Christians to make their “calling and election sure”, to strive for the narrow way because “broad is the way that leads to destruction”. The path we take is critical, for it determines whether we live or die.
3. **Baptism**. Noah’s ark going through the flood bore a witness to God. It was proof that some humans had believed what God had said and made the effort to take God’s method of deliverance. Sometimes, what God asks men to do seems ridiculous. Naaman the leper asked to wash in the river and one of his own choosing was not good enough. Scripture is filled with examples of acts of faith. Now if Christ asks you to be baptised and you don’t do it, you are hiding from God. You are saying to God, “I don’t have a good conscience”. You are saying, I am outside the Ark and if you so perish with the rest of mankind, whose fault is that? Its your fault because you chose to disobey God.

Noah was a preacher of righteousness. *2Pe 2:5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a **preacher of righteousness**, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;* He let others know about the right-wiseness of God. He knew about the need to be saved in a sinful world and that the time was fast approaching when God would settle the account, because the cry of the wicked had become too much for His ears. The Ark of Noah was a Divine clock, an hour glass where the sand was running out. Each timber beam, each nail, each pot of pitch added to the growing structure, as completion neared, was like the hands of the doomsday clock approaching midnight. Then the last day arrived, the last nail, the last brush of tar and it was finished and the rain drops started. Noah watched the approaching storm and took precautions, the rest of the people partied on. *Mat 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* The angel of death moves stealthily.

I have wondered whether Noah and his son’s alone built the Ark. They may have had many suppliers who daily saw the vessel grow. Just another religious crank but he pays good money. The wood delivery man, the supplier of bitumen, the rope manufacturer, the wholesale tool supplier and the rope merchant all contributed. There was probably even a grocer who delivered the final supplies before the storm broke. I do not think that when these people

realised that the storm really was coming, that they lay down and just died. I imagine it was panic, like a Tsunami, driving people to find a place to survive. Screaming and scratching, adrenalin flowing, panic stricken. I think if ever they find the Ark, It will have the marks of desperate people all over it. Scratches, cuts, axe marks, nail holes where people were trying to hold onto life. The desperate final throws of a fallen race.

I have no doubt that religious men were clawing and scraping on the wood of the Ark as one by one they were washed away in the flood. Just as men clawed, cut and beat Christ as God's judgement descended upon the cross. The ark like Christ's own body, will bear testimony to judgement. Noah prepared against that stealthy coming of the Lord. *Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. **By faith** Noah, being warned of God of things **not seen as yet, moved with fear**, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which **he condemned the world**, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

Faith we are told comes by hearing *Rom 10:17 ... and hearing by the word of God*. Noah acted upon the word of God because he acted by faith. There is a mistaken view that "faith" is some idea that pops into your mind and you hang onto it hoping it will become real. This is not faith but wishful thinking if there is no basis in God's word. No. Faith is not blind belief. Faith is the power of God that enables us to act. *Rom 4:20 And he did not waver in unbelief at the promise of God, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God and being fully convinced that what he had promised, he was also able to do. LEB*. Faith empowers us to fulfil the Word of God. As Spurgeon said, "Faith is the root-grace: all other virtues and graces spring from it". Lord increase our faith.

How many homes have in them the plans for life, the book of scripture and yet so few build upon it? What moved Noah to build? Fear. He feared or respected his God and he feared for his family. Just one mistake in carrying out the plans and all would be lost. He knew the silent killer that had visited the Egyptians, the Angel of death, who would soon be visiting the land he lived in. Fear focused his mind. Oh you will say, we NT Christians have nothing to fear, fear has been taken away from us. Think again! *Heb 4:1 **Let us therefore fear**, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Eph 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another **in the fear of God**. Php 2:12 ..work out your own salvation **with fear and trembling**.*

Beware the silent killer.

Two types of Human

Part 59. Rev 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Christ expects us to be overcomers. That statement alone should make it clear, straight away, that life in the Church will not protect us from sin and evil rather it may expose us to evil.

There will be something to overcome. Not just sin in our lives but sin that is outside our lives. Four of the Seven Churches have some connection to satan (Smyrna Rev 2 v 9, Pergamos Rev 2 v 13, Thyatira Rev 2 v 24 and Philadelphia 3 v 9). They are under attack in some way from the powers of darkness. Evil is not just a principle personified in the devil. Just as Christ is a reality so too is satan, yet the Churches have dumbed this down to the level of an old superstition. This is the truth, *Rev 12:12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.* We have all suffered at the hands of the murdering liar satan.

At this season when people celebrate Christ's birth, they should remember *1Jn 3:8For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil, or as the hymn put it "to save our souls from satan's power"*. It was many years ago while Christmas shopping, I heard this and stopped in my tracks and ended my affair with Christmas. If you honour a day to the Lord that is a personal choice. However, don't teach children lies in the name of Christ.

The devil's works are destroyed by the Christ and the war goes on. The dreamless sleep of the Churches fail to see the grinning devil in their midst, the murderer from the beginning, the "stealer away" of God's word. Have you heard his voice? What does it sound like? Why it sounds exactly like your voice. He is such a deceiver he can imitate your voice. That's why you never think you hear him. When Peter spoke, Christ heard Satan! *Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

Richard Wurmbands comment is relevant. He said that, "I have written that Marxism is Satanic. But is not every sin Satanic by its very nature? I pondered long about this. Then I had a dream one night that clarified my thinking. In my dream I saw a prostitute hooking young men who were just leaving Church. I asked her, "Why did you choose this particular place to work?" She replied, "My delight is to lead young men into sin just as they come from worship. The Greek word for worship in the New Testament is *proskune*, which means etymologically 'to kiss.' The worshiper stepping out of the house of prayer still has the imprint of Jesus' kisses on his mouth. What a satisfaction to defile him just then, to make him wallow in the bed of lasciviousness and then say to him, 'You see, Jesus to whom you prayed could not keep you from sin for even five minutes. He is not your Saviour. My master is more powerful than He.' "

You are most vulnerable when you are closest to Christ.

There are in this world only two sorts of person, those in Christ and those not in Christ. There are those in Christ and those in satan. Forget race, colour and ethnicity. There are only good people and bad people. When the NT speaks of salvation and eternal life with Christ in heaven, it speaks to just one group of people not two. It does exactly the same when it speaks of those in sin. *Eph 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (READ).* There is only one group of people who are saved, quickened with Christ and raised to sit together in the heavenlies **in Christ**. Bear with me while I labour more on this. The Greek word "seated together" *συνεκαθισεν* *sunekathesin*, is a verb (a doing word) and is "aorist active

indicative third person". Put more simply, it means a done deed. The emphasis is upon the fact of the action rather than the duration of the action. In the indicative mood, the significance is that it happened.

It is just like the other verbs, "quicken together" συνεζωοποιησεν and "raised together" συνηγειρεν, they are all events as described by the tense of the verb as completed. It's the same tense that John uses when he recalls the water turned to wine *Joh 4:46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine*, the word "turned" or made is in the same tense and a completed action. It is something already accomplished. So we should live up to the fact that we are heaven's children not that we will in some future day become them. We and Jesus are one.

I also like the use of the greek preposition for "together" συν sun. The passage is describing our togetherness, not just with each other but with Jesus. We are altogether seated in the heavenlies. **NOW**. In fact I was in heaven before I was born. We live among the angels now and we sit in the balcony of heaven. Language is very important to our faith and if we lose the ability to use it correctly we shall downgrade our faith.

Now why have we been working to establish the point that there is only one group of believers and that they all are in heaven? It is because there are those, like the JW's who think that some believers end up in heaven and others end up on a new earth. Two groups. Salvation is deferred to some future point in time. For now, it is mostly uncertain unless you belong to a chosen group, like the 144,000. Some are more confident than others that they get to heaven and the New Earth is a sort of consolation prize. Well I am sure that there are people who have an uncertainty and if that is so they need to address some important issues.

The first major issue to confront is this. Have you sought after forgiveness in Christ? Have you had your personal sin dealt with and most importantly, do you know that you are forgiven? Do you know that? The epistles of John lay out before us the certainties in the life saved. Christians should covet these as jewels of faith. God's promises incarnate in our lives.

1Jn 2:18 Adventist and anticipating, 1Jn 3:2 Transformed and glorified, 1Jn 3:**14 No longer dead but ever alive**. 1Jn 3:19 Knowing whom we have believed 1Jn 3:24 Abiding in truth. 1Jn 5:2 Holding the word. 1Jn 5:15 Faith works in our lives. 1Jn 5:18 Delivered by Christ 1Jn 5:19 A divine world view 1Jn 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

Our text drives us not to complacency but to confirmation. It says, do not sit there just basking in the truth, start to live it. Do not just indulge in intellectual gluttony, exercise your faith. Do not become an obese listener but be a contender in the field. Well, if the Christians know they are Christ's why is there a warning about being removed from the book of life? If you are telling us of all of these certain signs, why the warning?

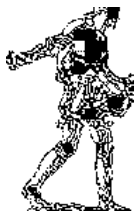
DV we shall try and understand why the scriptures speak so forcibly about the assurance of salvation, the certainty of eternal life, yet seem to make us question that certainty.

Proof of life

Part 60. Rev 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

We asked the question as to why the scriptures speak so forcibly about the assurance of salvation, the certainty of eternal life, yet make us question that certainty. Let us explore this by examining a parable. Jesus said that if we could understand the parable of the sower, we would be able to understand all parables. A parable is a story that has two meanings, a literal and spiritual meaning. The literal meaning disguises the spiritual meaning for the purpose of hiding the truth. *Mar 4:12 That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.* The parables, far from being designed to save mankind, are designed for exactly the opposite reason. Parables, then, are only of service to believers. This parable, like the passage in Ephesians 2 is about **the effect of the Gospel.**

Mar 4:13 And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? Mar 4:14 The sower soweth the word. Mar 4:15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. Mar 4:16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; Mar 4:17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. Mar 4:18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, Mar 4:19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. Mar 4:20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.



In the parable of the sower, the WORD of God is compared to a seed. You can see the sower with his bag of word seeds, dipping his hand in and throwing them in front of him. Casting seed over a wide area was called broadcasting and until Jethro Tull invented the seed drill, it was an imprecise process. When God's word is spoken or broadcast, it flies in all directions. Christ, as D L Moody said, taught us to pray but not how to preach. We merely broadcast the gospel and the ground on which it lands is the heart of man, for this is where God plants His word. *Mar 4:15 **satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.** 2Co 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this age hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

The heart is the core of our being, the engine that drives us, the seat of our spirituality *Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* It is no wonder then that we need heart surgery, no, more than that, a heart transplant. *Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* The stony ground and stony heart are one and the same from which it must be concluded that the good ground equates to the good heart.

So why the scriptures speak so forcibly about the assurance of salvation, the certainty of eternal life, yet make us question that certainty. I believe that the answer is to be found in this parable. The Word of God, the Gospel affects everyone who hears it. It affects everyone who hears it in a number of different ways and the way that it affects us is determined by the heart. Why we ask are some hearts disposed to receive and others not? You can answer that by going to the 9th Chapter of the book of Romans. God makes honourable and dishonourable pots! Yet it is obvious that some change in the heart must have occurred to make the good heart receptive. The other hearts remain unchanged.

The grace of God prepares the heart of the believer to receive His word just as a farmer does before sowing seed. The Spirit makes the soul cry for renewal *Psa 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

What do we see then? There will be people in this life that do not even get started in the faith because satan, like a crow, steals the seed way before it can even hit the ground (Mat 13 v 19). You will meet these people and they will say to you, I will hear you another time or I am not interested. Paul encountered these when he spoke in Athens. *Act 17:32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed:* The gospel effects people differently. What is life and health to you is a mockery to others.

There is another sort of person who seem to receive it with great joy *Mar 4:16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; Mar 4:17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.* Unfortunately it is in a stony place, cast upon a stony heart. These people you will think have become Christians and they themselves might think that too. Why, I have know many of them and they seemed perfect specimens of zeal for the Lord. They would be indistinguishable from Christians, then one day, they are no longer there.

I remember a young boy years ago, who plead with his pastor to baptise him. Years later when he grew up, he threw Christ off and so has continued since. I have seen many people fall by the wayside having no longer any interest in Christ. There was no rooting of the word, nothing to sustain it. Yet it is not without hope while there is life but when death comes to the

unbeliever they pass beyond hope. *Pro 11:7 When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth.*

The stony ground hearer and the thorny ground hearer are similar. The word goes in but doesn't last. Over time it dies away and the world that was there before returns and all the effects of the word are overgrown. You may also expect to find these people to be in the Churches for where else would they go? It may explain why so many people in Churches seem dead to God's word because it has choked the life. The world has drawn them back and away from Christ but they are still locked in to the habit of religion. Yet it is a dead religion. You will see, if you watch their lives, because they have no root, they do not grow and they do not produce spiritual fruit. Growth and fruit are indicators that the word of God has rooted. I have seen people who said they had known the Lord for years but showed no growth.

Here is Spurgeon's comment on a Church that he ministered to.

"I am very thankful that I have never been the pastor of a dead Church controlled by dead deacons. I have seen such a thing as that with my own eyes, and the sight is truly awful. I recollect very well preaching in a chapel where the Church had become exceedingly low, and somehow the very building looked like a sepulchre, though crowded that one night by those who came to hear the preacher. The singers drawled out a dirge while the members sat like mutes. I found it hard preaching; there was no 'go' in the sermon, I seemed to be driving dead horses. After the service I saw two men who, I supposed, were the deacons,—the pillars of the Church,—leaning against the posts of the vestry door in a listless attitude, and I said, 'Are you the deacons of this Church?' They informed me that they were the only deacons, and I remarked that I thought so. To myself I added that it would have been a riddle. Here was a dead Church, comparable to the ship of the ancient mariner which was manned by the dead. Deacons, teachers, minister, people—all dead, and yet wearing the semblance of life."

Some people think that the OT portrays a harsh God. No! I think that it portrays a loving God but His people are hard people, with hard hearts *Mar 10:5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.* God has to add laws to temper the stony hearts from the damage they can cause. For those held under the OT law, I advise to examine your hearts. There will be those in Churches who exhibit stony hearts because they do not have the Word of the gospel rooted in them. There is only one of the four groups that survive and I am led to wonder if this is the proportion of success for the gospel then, *Mat 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.*

Whereas you can see the fruit on a tree or plant, the root is hidden in the darkness of the soil. The root sustains the life of the plant. The root feeds from the water and minerals from the ground, it holds the plant in place, it stores food for the plant and it prevents soil erosion. I will leave you to find the spiritual analogies for these features. Those I will call the "good hearts" will find themselves among the "stony hearts" *Mar 4:20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.* Notice that it is "FRUIT" not "WORKS" nor "GIFTS". It is what

springs from the life in the seed, the expression of the vital spiritual DNA that shows the parent we are born from.

The true heart will grow the fruit of the Spirit *Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.* The “stony hearts” cannot produce fruit because they never rooted and grew. The “good heart” can because Christ is there. *Eph 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,*

The messages to the Churches of Revelation which continues to exhort them to repent confirms that there are within Churches souls that think they are right with God and are not. The danger for the “good hearts” is that they will be led away by the “stony hearts” and by this away from Christ. That is why we are encouraged to *Php 2:12work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* The question for us is then, what takes precedence in our lives over Christ? If the world, its cares and its riches do, then we are thrown back to examine our hearts.

2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? AV. 2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are still in the Christian faith. Test yourselves! Don't you recognize that you are people in whom Jesus Christ lives? Could it be that you're failing the test? GW.

We haven't yet looked in detail at the exhortation to “overcome” but DV we will come to that. For now, this is what we overcome. *1Jn 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God **overcometh the world:** and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* We overcome the world. The world that satan would drag us back to and the dirt that comes with it. That is why the reward here is a clean white garment to signify that victory. *1Co 15:54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.* We walk in clean clothes unsullied by the dirt of the world.

The Church of the middle way

Part 61. *Rev 3:14 And unto the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.*

There are those who tread carefully and halt between opinions and hence have none of their own. Yet the idea that you can have some sort of neutrality when it comes to faith and practice is not born out by the word of God. Jesus said, *Luk 11:23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.* The reality is that you cannot be in the middle, tepid, half way, fence squatting, neutral when it comes to Jesus. You may not have made up your mind but that still leaves you in the camp of those who scatter. You may think

you can be agnostic but from His mouth He says that you are anti-Christ. Anyone who rejects Christ is antichrist and that rejection covers the demands of His Lordship.

Being tepid, neither hot nor cold, is worse than being cold. There is an indifference that has entered the heart of this Church at Laodicea, a complacency that has undermined their foundations and a loss of all vision that is leading them rapidly towards Divine rejection. They are beginning to make God sick and He will puke them out. This illustration is quite poignant because it illustrates Christ removing something from within His body. They would, if they didn't change, no longer be part of His body, no longer IN CHRIST. They would be expelled.

The idea that you can opt out of the Christian war, become a neutral country like Switzerland and be at peace with the antagonists does not cut with Christ. That they, the Laodiceans, could become complacently rich through neutrality was unacceptable. The Swiss enriched themselves not just from the victims of the Holocaust but also from the perpetrators. Switzerland was the favourite haven for Nazi bank accounts and safe deposit boxes, which often contained property plundered from Jews. Swiss banks did a lucrative business with the German Reichsbank and with individual Nazi officials. Symbolically, even the royalties from Hitler's Mein Kampf were deposited in a Swiss bank account. It may not surprise you to learn that Laodicea was also a banking centre.

Laodicea and Colosse were close to each other, about 10 miles apart (here in Bracknell to Reading). It would seem that they may have had similar problems because they shared the same letter. *Col 4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise **read the epistle from Laodicea***. There is a possibility that there was a letter, an epistle from Paul to the Laodiceans, however, some think that this refers to another letter being circulated already (Ephesians). That is all lost in the mists of time.

*Col 2:1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, **and for them at Laodicea**, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; Col 2:2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; Col 2:3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Col 2:4 And this I say, lest any man should **beguile** you with **enticing words**.*

When Paul writes his letters, he is entering the field of Apologetics. The Greek apologia means "speaking in defence". It is the branch of theology concerned with the defence and rational justification of Christianity. You may have thought that an apology was saying sorry for some wrong but to the contrary, it is defending a position. The letters of the NT are all about apologetics. They are not full of trivial conversation about grandma, the weather, sports results or the latest gossip. They are instructive of the errors attacking the Churches.

*Col 2:4 And this I say, lest any man should **beguile** you with **enticing words***. You may know the word analogue and analogy, which means to compare, here we have a parologue which means

to reason beside, or reason falsely, hence beguile. We also have peithologues or persuading reasons, hence “enticing words”. Paralogues and peithologues lead to Apologues.

The early Church was soon under attack from the world around. It always will be under attack because it is engaged in a fight to the death. *Gal 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world (age), according to the will of God and our Father:* The fundamental beliefs of Christians will always be under attack by satan. *2Ti 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*

Do you know who said, “The most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly - it must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over”? It was the same person who said, “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it”. Yes, it was Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in Nazi Germany. Those few points repeated over and over, such as every time we see something wonderful in a natural history programme, we drop in the words, “Millions of years” and “evolution”.

Do you notice how subtle the devil is when it comes to compromising us? Let me give you an example. The rise of the homosexualist gained pace in the 1980’s. One of the subtle ways of accepting it was when we starting singing their homosexual hymns. People began singing “Relax” by “Frankie goes to Hollywood”, with its open references to sexuality. I imagine many people didn’t understand some of the lyrics but they sang along anyway and after a time **its in there**, like the songs that are paraded out every Christmas. Before we know it, we have accepted the devils ideas as not that bad anyway. Ideas can permeate the Church subtly and permanently. We seriously need to assess the influence of the media in our lives.

This week we were told that “Researchers at the University of New South Wales have warned that our planet could warm by more than 8°C by 2200 if CO₂ emissions are not reduced”, meanwhile and at the same time, “A team of Australian climate scientists set out on a Russian research ship MV Akademik Shokalskiy on a mission to raise awareness of global warming and got stuck in pack ice (in Antarctic midsummer)”. Despite the fact that there has been no global warming for the past 17 years, With CO₂ continuing to rise, we are informed that we must cut emissions and pay huge sums for that privilege.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) maintained a 95-percent confidence level that mankind is to blame for most catastrophic climate change. That “confidence level” as I have pointed out before, is not based on numerical data, it is based on the subjective opinion of those involved in the project. In other words it is a guess based upon what they feel about it. So here is another example of how that, if we say things over and over, people will begin to accept what is said. Any time there is a natural catastrophe, link the images to the words “global warming”.

One way of introducing falsehoods is to make them similar to the truth and reinterpret the truth. For example, *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect*

of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Col 2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. They would take a belief, such as the Sabbath, and make it an issue of worship. We would all agree that there are teaching about the Sabbath in the OT, so how should we view it in the NT? Well, clearly here was a group of teachers loading the Colossians and Laodiceans with things that you cannot be held to judgement on.

Col 2:16 Don't let anyone tell you what you must eat or drink. Don't let them say that you must celebrate the New Moon festival, the Sabbath, or any other festival. Col 2:17 These things are only a shadow of what was to come. But Christ is real! CEV. The Apostles and Teachers of the NT stand in the breach as defenders of the faith, as the New Covenant Church takes root. I may be oversimplifying but there were three major things influencing error in the New Testament. Firstly, things relating to salvation in Christ and secondly, obligations to the law of Moses and thirdly contemporary religious views.

On the first, we see disputes as to whether one is saved solely by faith in Christ, justification by faith or are works necessary? On the second, we see the attempts to continue ceremonial obligations, like circumcision (dealt with in Acts 15). On the third, influences of religious groups like the Gnostics and their special knowledge of things, *Col 2:18 Don't be cheated by people who make a show of acting humble and who worship angels. They brag about seeing visions. But it is all nonsense, because their minds are filled with selfish desires.* CEV. To this third group I would add contemporary philosophy from the Greeks and Romans although it entered a bit later.

The Laodiceans must have picked up some ideas of the age just like that. Things like, "we must be alright with God because we are so blessed with our wealth". Possibly they had fallen into the gospel of prosperity. They had grown fat and complacent. We lack nothing. Whatever the inner thoughts of the Church, they were blind to their spiritual state, they were blind to their separation from fellowship with Christ. They could not see that Christ, far from being the head of the Church, was not even in the Church, He was outside of the door. BEHOLD! Did you not even see that? They were blind to that fact.

The Emperor's New Clothes" is a short tale by Hans Christian Andersen about two crooked weavers who promise an Emperor a new suit of clothes that is invisible to those unfit for their positions, those who are stupid, or incompetent. This of course would improve the quality of his ministers. Eventually, the invisible cloth was woven and the new suit fitted to the monarch. When the Emperor paraded before his subjects in his new clothes, a child cried out, "But he isn't wearing anything at all!" Perhaps, like that King, many in the Churches are deceived into thinking they are clothed in righteousness, when in fact they are stark naked?

The prosperity Gospel

Church Part 62. Rev 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: Rev 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be

rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

In 2009, the American televangelist Oral Roberts died. At the time of his death, Roberts' ministry and celebrity had been in decline for years, a drop-off accelerated by a prophecy the preacher made 22 years before, that "God will call me home" unless \$8 million was raised for scholarships to Oral Roberts University by March 31, 1987. The money was raised, but by then Roberts had become a figure of ridicule to many inside and outside the Christian world. With dwindling revenues -- they once stood at more than \$100 million a year -- the televangelist was forced in 1989 to downsize his ministry, laying off 250 employees, closing Tulsa's City of Faith medical centre and an adjoining medical school, and selling vacation homes and luxury cars to raise money. Prosperity doctrine is the notion that God's favour is expressed mainly through physical health and material prosperity, and that these blessings are available for the "claiming" by anyone who has sufficient faith.

Roberts taught that money and material things donated to his organization were the seeds of prosperity and material blessings from God, and that God promises to multiply in miraculous ways whatever is given--and give many times more back to the donor. It was a simple, quasi-spiritual get-rich-quick scheme that appealed mainly to poor, disadvantaged, and desperate people. It generated untold millions for Roberts's empire and was quickly adopted by a host of similarly-oriented Pentecostal and Charismatic media ministries. The Seed-Faith principle is the main cash-cow that built and has supported vast networks of televangelists who barter for their viewers' money with fervent promises of "miracles"--and the miracles are invariably described in terms of material blessings, mainly money. It is flourishing in Africa.

One of the most prominent prosperity gospellers on the scene today is Joel Osteen, the pastor of the largest Church in America (Lakewood Church is a nondenominational Christian megaChurch located in Houston, Texas. It is the largest congregation in the United States, averaging more than 43,500 in attendance per week). Joel is a best-selling author, and a former student at Oral Roberts University. I like Joel's positive attitude but he does get a lot of flak probably out of envy for his success.

He tells his millions of readers and listeners that they should not settle for mediocre lives and I whole heartedly agree with him. He tells them they should trust in the Lord's ability to give them the house that they desire, the job that they deserve, and children that will make them proud. A typical piece of Osteenian advice: "friend, you have to start believing that good things are coming your way and they will!" "Living your best life now means being excited about the life God has given you. It means believing for more good things in the days ahead, while living in the moment and enjoying it to the hilt." Other advocates of this position today include the very popular televangelists Joyce Meyer and T.D. Jakes.

I even have a letter from Oral Roberts son Richard, (dated 1986) that came with a plastic capsule of olive oil to anoint yourself for healing and of course the opportunity to make a generous donation. "You and I, Richard Roberts, are going to join our faith together as we pray

for God to heal all your spiritual, physical and financial sickness” ...”For a financial healing, I feel led to have you take your wallet or billfold and make a cross on it with the anointing oil”.

Before we laugh these beliefs away, let us note that there are elements of truth in them. Remote healing was a gift that Paul possessed, *Act 19:11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: Act 19:12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.* Anointing with oil is certainly scriptural *Jas 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*

In terms of prosperity, *Pro 19:17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again. Luk 6:38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.* If ever there was an encouragement to be generous, there it is. I will certainly encourage you to be generous and give, but I will not collect it from you. I am not God’s banker. I will also encourage you to seek healing.

Perhaps therein lies the issue as to how we apply these truths. God’s gifts are not there to create a Church business. It’s a bit like selling indulgences in the Catholic Church. *Act 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Act 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. Act 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*

We certainly should question our lives and whether we are “Living our best life now, being excited about the life God has given us”. I think that the Laodiceans thought that they were living their best life. They certainly had a lot to show for it. They were a model of the prosperity gospel, **“thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”**. I imagine that we, in our comfortable 21st century armchairs, in our neat little 21st century homes, with cash in our 21st century bank accounts, new clothes on our backs, the latest gadgets and gizmos, could say the same. We lack nothing as far as this world goes.

So I must come back to a point we have made often. The purpose of the Gospel is to “deliver us from this present evil age”, not to embed us more deeply into it. If we have resources by the grace of God, are we using them for “delivery” or are we just making life more comfortable for those in the here and now? I think that more people will accept a social gospel of handouts rather than the saving Gospel of Christ. We look forward to healthy sunset years after a life lived for self and a prospect of heaven to come. Whoever said “all this and heaven too” though, was a madman. There is nothing here that we will look back on and lament because we are not of the spirit of Lot’s wife.

Jesus tell a parable of a prosperous merchant who had a retirement plan (Read Luke 12 v 16ff). After all his hard work, what better than a life on the Costas eating, drinking and enjoying himself. He would doubtless fill his new found hours with a hobby. Perhaps he wanted to

indulge in Camel racing, chariotteering, pottery or spear throwing. I hear the devil whispering to him "You're worth it, you deserve it after all your hard work". In all this retirement planning, there was no place for God. That could wait for later, much, much later. Yet it came much sooner than the "later" he had hoped. He was called that very night all was in place and left the lot, hopefully not to other persons equally selfish retirement plan.

You know, I cannot remember hearing anything from retired Christians about how they planned to do things for The Lord, how would like to use that new found time as an opportunity for service. It becomes a self indulgent time of travel and time fill. It reflects, I think, the lack of Christianity in our previous working lives and this just dribbles into our retirement. So wait a minute, while you are counting your blessings and naming them one by one, how about taking a heavenly inventory. We are told, *Mat 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: Mat 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

It may not be obvious to some, so I will state it, that in order to have treasure in heaven, you must open an account in heaven. The idea, that anyone can start laying up treasure in heaven and that all humans from birth have an open account, is not proven. In fact that idea might lead to men thinking that somehow, their works might be of merit in their salvation. They might think it offsets their debit in this life, that their sin is counterbalanced by good works. I suggest that that treasure in heaven can only begin to be accumulated in heaven, when we take our place in heaven, seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. *Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:*

Treasures are simply things we value and therefore want to have. Things that we want to find, work for, keep, use and perhaps share. It is an indicator of what our hearts desire. *Luk 12:34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* You have a look at Christian lives and what people do with their time and you will get a good idea where their treasure is. Compare ourselves with the aging William Booth who said as we have noted before, "I will tell you the secret. God has had all there was of me". And when he lost his sight, he pressed on, "God knows best. I have done what I could for God and the people with my eyes. Now I must do what I can for God and the people without my eyes."

Every month, I get a bank statement that tells me what I have left in my account. Every month I know exactly what I am worth. Wouldn't it be nice, you might think, to find how much you have in the Bank of Heaven? I think that it is possible. You go to work and as a result you get remunerated for the time you spend. Of course that may vary according to your position in the company or organisation. It will reflect your value and gifts or put biblically, the number of talents you have. So it is quite possible to see, for example, over the space of a week, just how much you have done in terms of heavenly activities. You may possibly gauge your heavenly income by the amount of time you attend upon it. You know where you have been putting your treasure.

I am sure that when we glance back from Eternity, we shall wonder why we did so many things that from the eternal perspective are valueless. The Laodiceans had a heap of valueless accumulations. All ready for the fire when Jesus comes and says, your treasure is all wrong. You need to get some stuff from me not the world. Jesus says that some of the “stuff” we have is convertible, *Mat 19:21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come take up the cross and follow me.* We can do good with our stuff. It is a question of whether we are buying real estate in the “best life now” or whether we are buying the things from Christ in the “best life to come”.

It is clear that everything that the Laodiceans had acquired was eternally useless. Eternally worthless. It has no value here in God’s eyes and no place in the life hereafter. It was shadows and dust. *1Co 3:11 After all, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that is already laid, and that foundation is Jesus Christ. People may build on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw. The day will make what each one does clearly visible because fire will reveal it. That fire will determine what kind of work each person has done.* GW. There it is. There is the answer. The treasure in heaven is what we build in Christ and what we obtain through fellowship with Christ. Lasting treasure, true coverings and eye treatment. When men are raking through the ashes of their failed lives, I wonder if a cynical little voice will pipe up “Should have gone to Spec Savers?”

Victory

Part 64. Rev 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

We draw this series to a finale as we turn to look at the “Overcomer” (νίκη nikē). In Greek mythology, Nike was a goddess who personified victory, also known as the Winged Goddess of Victory. The Roman equivalent was Victoria. The sports company with the “swoosh” logo takes its name from Nike. The overcomer is the victor, the conqueror. *1Jn 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

We have seen these Churches both at war and at compromise in our study of the seven Churches. We have also seen that the Church is not a waiting room in the departure lounge of the flight to glory but regiments fighting the principalities and powers of the age. Now, I might not be able to change the wicked laws of my age, I might not be able to stop the filthy practices of my age, I might not be able to stem the tide of godlessness or persuade the sinner from his ways, yet, I do not however have to bow to their sin or accept their views. I do not have to compromise my faith and bow down to the gods of ignorance and the gods of wickedness. I can choose to stand against them and **hold fast**.

For some of the Churches it is a holding game. **Thyatira** Rev 2:25 *But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.* **Sardis** Rev 3:3 *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a*

thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Philadelphia Rev 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. They can overcome by holding fast against the tide.

When I look at the newspaper headline stories in my day and age, on this particular day (16/1/2014) I see, “3 cases of sexual abuse by media celebrities on trial”, “Child sex gang found guilty of series of rapes against five vulnerable girls including one aged just twelve”, “98,000 abortions, or 378 every working day, were given the go-ahead **without any record** of the doctor having met the woman (200,000 abortions are carried out in the UK each year)”, “Woman caught having sex on car bonnet in broad daylight with a man she met in a shop minutes earlier”, “Almost 1,000 teachers accused of having affairs with pupils in last five years but only a quarter faced criminal charges”, “Judge 'lied to police to help her friend Vicky Pryce and destroy ex-cabinet minister Chris Huhne's career in speeding points case'”, “Engineer 'raped Muslim woman and took £10,000 of her life savings after blackmailing her with lingerie pictures'” etc etc!

You might agree with me, that this tip of the iceberg suggests that we are living in times which make Sodom and Gomorrah look normal. Yet here we are in the 21st century, living in a society that is riddled with the same sins. *Gen 13:13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly. It was ripe for destruction Gen 19:12 Then the men asked Lot, "Do you have anyone else here-any in-laws, sons, daughters, or any other relatives in the city? Get them out of here because we're going to destroy this place. The complaints to the LORD against its people are so loud that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.* GW. I would say that we, in 2014, are ripe for destruction and would have no excuse should it suddenly fall upon us.

Now you may take issue with what I am going to say but bear with me. **I hope that you have something of Lot in you.** I know that many Christians would find that comment insulting. They have a low view of Lot because of where he chose to live and who he lived with but I think that they are wrong. I hope you are like Lot in this generation. People think that because Lot lived in a place with homosexuals it was a sign of his sinfulness. Well, there are Christians in Brighton which claims to be the UK's gay capital and that does not make them sinful. Those Christians may be the last thing that stands between the wrath of God and judgement. I thank God that they are there as a witness.

The fact is, that if Lot had been an unrighteous man, God would not have rescued him and Abraham would not have hardly interceded for him. We often have to make difficult choices in this life, especially when it comes to earning a living. Lot was offered a choice about where to live and he chose Sodom because it looked good. In the event it didn't look that good when he got to know the inhabitants. I also do not believe that Lot participated in the sins of Sodom. The apostle Peter makes an inspired comment *2Pe 2:7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:* The word “vexed” means worn down. He was paying a high price for his choices. That said, he didn't compromise his faith.

When the angels came and the sodomites demanded access to them *Gen 19:5 They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to stay with you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we*

can have sex with them." GW Lot resisted, Gen 19:7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Gen 19:8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door.

I do not intend to judge Lot's offer of his daughters to the wicked men on that spur of the moment. Yet you know how the story runs out and the men are blinded, Lot escapes and the city is destroyed, along with Lot's wife who just had to cast one last look at it. Perhaps one day they will find her. Now I return to my point.

*2Pe 2:7 Yet, God rescued Lot, a man who had his approval. Lot was **distressed** by the lifestyle of people who had no principles and lived in sexual freedom. Although he was a man who had God's approval, he lived among the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Each day was like **torture** to him as he saw and heard the immoral things that people did. Since the Lord did all this, he knows how to rescue godly people **when they are tested**. He also knows how to hold immoral people for punishment on the day of judgment. GW.*

Lot was a winner. Lot was a victor a conqueror, an overcomer and we shall meet him. He lived in a day when men would not listen to him but he did not cast aside the faith. He did not become a fornicator in a world where fornication was accepted. He did not drop his values to match those around him. As the only faithful man in Sodom, he held to his values, one man against the city, he was literally **outstanding**. He **held fast**. He lived in the only house that honoured God. He protected strangers from the evils of his city. He did not support homosexuality, in fact he resisted it. He even positioned himself in the gates of sin city to help travellers.

Lot did not have a bible to comfort him. He had no Church to go to. He had no Christian friends living with him in that city. He lacked the devotional literature and books of Christian comfort and exhortation. That never stopped him from holding the faith and he didn't blame shift to others for his situation. His knowledge of God was limited to oral tradition but he clung to that truth he was given to hold. Righteousness saved his life, not just in this world but more importantly, in the next.

Much maligned Lot, **overcame** in his day and was written in to scripture as an example to us. Not perhaps in a particularly spectacular way, not by being a great evangelist with thousands of converts, but by being steadfast and unmoveable. *1Co 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye **steadfast, unmoveable**, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.* In our day too, we may not be spectacular but we can be faithful. People may not listen to us but that is no reason we should not listen to God. We may live in an age of declension rather than revival but that does not stop us from being conquerors. Look at this remarkable passage from Romans.

*Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall **tribulation**, or **distress**, or **persecution**, or **famine**, or **nakedness**, or **peril**, or **sword**? Rom 8:36 As it is written, For thy sake we are **killed** all the day long; we are accounted as **sheep for the slaughter**. Rom 8:37 **Nay, in all these things** we are **more than conquerors** through him that loved us. Rom 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither **death**, nor **life**, nor **angels**, nor **principalities**, nor **powers**, nor things **present**, nor **things to come**, Rom 8:39 Nor **height**, nor **depth**, nor **any other creature**, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Now those verses do not promise us an easy ride. *2Ti 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.* There is a lot there that might bring our faith to breaking point, yet above and over all, there is held the inseparable love of Christ. He will love us through life's obstacles but He will not promise to take us around them. He will take His Joseph's to the stinking, dark, dirty dungeons of Egypt and not desert him there. He will take his apostle through a hurricane and deliver him to dry land. He will later have him killed but forever love him. He will take those of exemplary character and cast them in a furnace of fire or into a lions den and deliver them. They will overcome.

Stephen was martyred for his faithfulness, the first martyr of the New Testament Church. In his powerful outspoken condemnation of the Sanhedrin and the priests, Stephen had signed his own death warrant. He must have known the consequences of his words but he, none-the-less spoke out. And as they fumed and ranted and ground their teeth in discomfort at his words, a wonderful thing happens. *Act 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus **standing** on the right hand of God.*

It is as if the Lord Jesus stands in acknowledgement of Stephen's speech and reveals his throne to Stephen, inviting him to sit with Him. To the lukewarm Laodiceans comes the same invitation, *Rev 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.* To you and I comes the same invitation.

Being a Christian is more than being a soul that is saved. It is more than being a member of a congregation. It is about the transformation of a fallen human into an immortal, fit for the service of his creator. It is about readiness for the life to come and with it all these blessings, to the victor the spoils.

- Rev 2:7 I give to eat of the **tree of life**, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.
- Rev 2:11 shall **not be hurt** of the second death.
- Rev 2:17 I give to eat of the **hidden manna**, and will give him a **white stone**, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.
- Rev 2:26 I give **power** over the nations:
- Rev 3:5 I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will **confess his name** before my Father, and before his angels.
- Rev 3:12 I make a **pillar in the temple** of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will **write upon him** the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is

new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

- Rev 3:21 I grant to **sit with me** in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.
- Rev 21:7 **I will be his God, and he shall be my son.**

That is where I end and that is where we shall begin our journey beyond time in the presence of our Creator God, as everlasting sons. Amen.