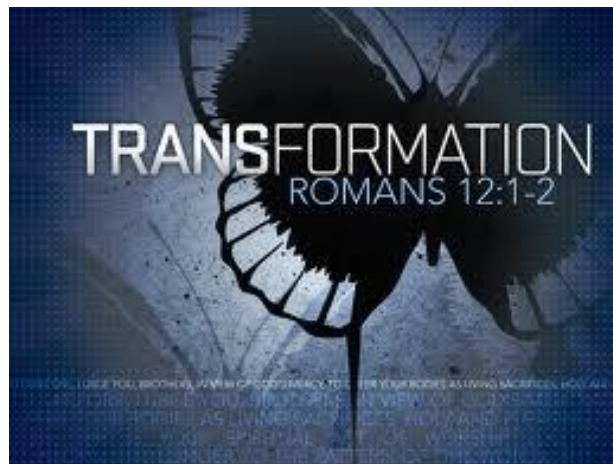




Walking **With Jesus** Ministries

# TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHURCH



**CHANGES GOD REQUIRES IN HIS CHURCH TODAY  
IN ORDER TO PRODUCE THE PERFECTED  
'BRIDE OF CHRIST'**

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# INTRODUCTION

One day, while in the shower, (that is, from a bucket) in Nairobi, Kenya, the Lord gave me a revelation.

I had just seen the amazing new TBN broadcasting auditorium on TV, filled with beautiful people (it seems compulsory for preachers to have glamorous wives, generally much younger than themselves!), fantastic choirs, singers and setting, all broadcast over 47 satellites.

In the shower the Lord showed me a picture of the Pentecostal church. How it started in storefronts and homes, of how rejected these first weird 'pentes' were. But these early pentecostals remained fully committed to the cause, staying close to God, for they were then at the forefront of God's revelation and indeed, presence.

Gradually however, Pentecostalism (now with a capital 'P',) has become mainstream. Pastors (and now Bishops) have become elevated beyond a job description or a calling, to positions above the people – a new priesthood. In the west, new pastors must be seminary trained, and are likely receive a reasonable salary from the beginning of their ministry. No longer is their real sacrifice in being 'called' to ministry.

In our services, the emphasis has changed from listening to the Holy Spirit and following His desires, to a concentration on excellence and good order, to the near exclusion of the Holy Spirit leading us. Worship times, unlike the days of the storefront believers, are based on a proven formula of thanksgiving, praise, then worship, followed by (maybe) a prophecy, then the Word and finally ministry – until we all go home after exactly 2 hours.

Next comes an emphasis on building buildings 'for the glory of God', as so grandiosely epitomized by TBN. I have been involved in three different pentecostal churches over the years and have seen this process in practice. All churches that started meeting in homes, then storefronts or halls, before being 'called' to build or buy a church. The church then has to be rebuilt to be bigger, or ancillary buildings added, so that a 'church complex' is created.

Often too, we hear the statement, 'God is in the house'. Wow! Fantastic! But is it true? Is God really in these beautiful structures man has created? Or rather, is He in the hearts of the people who inhabit the house? Or again, has He departed altogether, to allow us to 'play church' in the beautiful temples we have built.

The process of 'monument building' that started in the fourth century AD with the Roman Catholic Church, and which continued after the Reformation once those churches became mainstream, continues today as Pentecostalism enters the mainstream also. This seems to be the process of a 'maturing church'.

The Lord showed me that the people He calls on to impart the next revelation are those with the kingdom within, those dissatisfied with the established status quo, those hungering for more of Him. Those whose emphasis remains on the spiritual, who have not been seduced by the inevitable physical emphasis of the 'maturing' church.

Today God is calling out another new generation, as He has in times past. It is a new generation desiring to move forward into the new (but old!) truths of submission and obedience to the Father's will, of servanthood and

sacrifice, a simple people with hearts sold out to God, those who will finally fulfil the Great Commission. A Church not of Pastors, Programmes and Property, but of 'kingdom people', who, through their sacrifice, will usher in the return of Jesus.

# SETTING THE SCENE

As we proceed through this teaching, some are going to be challenged, others offended.

I simply ask that if this is you, place what is said 'on the shelf' and leave it for another day. For the Lord reveals truth to us one step at a time. What we do not understand today, we may well be ready to receive later. Our walk with Jesus is very much a journey of discovery, not a single event.

Everything we discuss has the ultimate aim of bringing both our congregations (if applicable) and ourselves closer to Jesus.

Nearly everybody agrees, in theory, that this is a good thing. Indeed, more than that, it is the real role of ministry. Unfortunately however, much of what we do in church, in reality, is not oriented towards this goal. Sometimes this is deliberate, but very often, we follow traditions or create new ones, that serve to draw us away from God towards man, or structures, or..... The list goes on.

We all too easily become 'Old Testament' 'Christians', two things which are actually mutually exclusive. We cannot be the believers Jesus intended us to be, finding fullness in Him, if we go back to Old Testament ways. For Jesus came to bring a new way.

*"6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." (Romans 7:6)*

The '*new way of the Spirit*' is actually very hard to follow, for it involves training, testing, and waiting upon His timing, which invariably, is longer than our own.

An example of this is found in the poem, 'Waiting'. It is the story of our wait for a building to lease in order to open a large store for *africa arise*, our project to help in a practical way the poor of Africa. It shows a greater ability to rest from my own endeavours, learning to relax in Him, shows as a progression through the poem, as each week I recorded that week's happenings and my reactions, as honestly as I could. I know that He taught me and built my faith through this. I trust it comes through to you too.

## **WAITING**

Wait for a time,  
Then a little more,  
Seeking a rhyme,  
What's it all for!

I want it now!  
Not next week!  
You do know how!  
To me now speak!

God, all is in your power,  
Don't let my life go sour!  
I already know what is the best!  
No need to put me to the test!

Still nothing happens this week!

"Just wait for Me my son,  
Rest in Me, let Me to you speak,  
One day, all will be done."

Tuesday comes around,  
A new deal awaits.  
Found common ground,  
With Christian mates.

Full of promise,  
Full of hope.  
Surely can't miss!  
Nope! Nope! Nope!

Wednesday now,  
Sign a deal!  
We know how!  
It's a steal!

Then get a call,  
Deal does fall!  
Lord I give up!  
Hand You the cup.

Agony is inside,  
It I can't hide.  
What now can I do?  
But give it to you.



It's Friday afternoon,  
Speak to another man,  
Another deal soon?  
Yes God, you can!

Wait, wait; wait, wait,  
No more, bull at a gate.  
God, your will be done,  
I'm at peace - your son.

Another deal done,  
Contract written.  
End of the fun.  
End of the mission.

Given to his lawyer,  
We're nearly there!  
Need go no further,  
No need to despair.

The lawyer says no,  
No place now to go!  
It has fallen over,  
Home again Rover!

This time peace does reign,  
Getting upset is no gain.

It's in the Lord's hands now,  
Just needs to show us how!

Monday comes, another deal.  
Great rent, it's a steal!  
At last, something now, to us to show,  
But is it the best, must wait to know.

Two weeks more,  
Before we hear,  
A deal in store,  
Or a bum steer?

But now peace reigns,  
God makes the gains.  
It's all up to Him,  
The battle to win.

Nothing to do but only wait.  
Easier now for David Tait.  
As I trust Him even more,  
For what He has in store.

Wednesday, a call out of the blue,  
Sounds too good, to be true.  
New on the market that very day.  
Maybe for this, has been the delay.

An offer on Friday,

Now wait some more,  
Hear on Tuesday,  
If not before.

'Just rest in me, my son,  
In my time, it is done.  
Trust me more and more,  
I will open the door.'

The days pass.  
Am at peace.  
Nothings fast,  
With a lease!

Late Thursday afternoon,  
Could it be so soon?  
An agreement comes,  
Have done their sums.

It is all we requested,  
Bar one point or two.  
Our prayer is answered,  
'It's God's gift to you!'

Friday morning,  
Points included,  
No more waiting,  
Signature added.

Deal is done!  
Now the fun!  
Getting started,  
Waiting departed.

Thank you so much Lord!  
We are in one accord.  
It surely has to be of you,  
Deal's too good to be true!

Lord, as I now muse on what I've learned,  
I see that more of you, I have discerned.  
Now know I can always rely upon You in all You ask me I do,  
Just need to wait, to rest, to fully trust, yes, it's true.

It is my prayer that as we share in this study, we will all learn together what  
the Lord desires of us as His people, in today's world.

# **PART 1**

## **RESTORATION OF HOLY SPIRIT POWER AND DIRECTION**

# HOLY SPIRIT IN THE INDIVIDUAL

Every church and church grouping thinks they are led by the Holy Spirit! In many cases this may once have been so, but the harsh reality is, people quickly take over from the Holy Spirit.

How can I say this? It is simple. Every visitation, or revival as we call it, of the Holy Spirit since the time of the first one on the Day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus, has ended, has finished. Why? Right from the beginning of the church, mankind has known better, finally manipulating the Holy Spirit visitation, until the 'gentleman Spirit' has left, saddened by our human reaction to His presence and guidance.

But do we need the Holy Spirit to guide us individually and as the church? I could quote scriptures, but what I want to do today is to take a brief look at His practical effect upon the Disciples, the initial leaders of the early New Testament church.

We have the 11 - reduced from 12, through the treachery of Judas. A rag tag bunch they were too. In spite of having lived with Jesus for 3 1/2 years, they slept, then deserted Jesus in His greatest hour of need, and one, at least, denied having ever known Him. Even after the wonder of His resurrection, Thomas still wouldn't believe until he could physically touch the wounds of Jesus.

*24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." 26 A week later*

*his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:24-8)*

Following His Ascension they decided, in their human wisdom, to appoint Matthias as the replacement apostle for Judas, using the Old Covenant method of casting lots.

*20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it," and, "May another take his place of leadership." 21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." 23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:20-26)*

A disaster! Jesus Himself later chose and appeared to His replacement choice, that completely unsuitable candidate in the apostles' eyes, Paul.

*10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." 13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest*

*all who call on your name.” 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” 17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. (Acts 9:10-19)*

Yet amazingly, something happened to change this group of 11 apostles, plus Paul, to make them all except die as martyrs for Jesus! John, the single exception, was allegedly boiled in oil without dying, then banished to Patmos, no holiday camp.

Several years ago, I visited the site in India where the now, non-doubting Thomas made landfall and converted the first Christians in India. A Roman Catholic church is on the site and a beautiful presence of the Holy Spirit permeates the surroundings. A fantastic experience! He was finally martyred near Chennai (formerly Madras) on the opposite coast of this great country. (Pictured)

What happened to so dramatically change these men? We all know!

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)*



Yes, the visitation, then habitation, of the Holy Spirit changed these men from misfits to martyrs!

What about the teachings of Jesus, you may well ask? Certainly they gave substance and direction to the life the apostles were now about to embark on, but the power to change them from wimps to winners for Jesus was provided by the impartation and habitation of the Holy Spirit on that day precious Pentecost day.

Throughout history, nothing has changed. Those who radically change the world for Jesus have been, and invariably still are, filled with the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

**Yes, the first and primary transformation required in the church today is the restoration of Holy Spirit Power and direction.**

# HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

Having considered the working of the Holy Spirit in the individual believer, now we will have a look at His role in the church.

As we approach this controversial subject, I would simply ask that you put to one side preconceived ideas of 'how to do church', usually inherited from, or highly influenced by, those who have gone before.

In the church, we have a battle between letting the Holy Spirit guide and lead us in what we do, and operating the church in what leadership sees as 'good order'. In reality, the Holy Spirit is a gentleman (gentleperson to be PC!) who does not pressure us to follow His ways. Therefore leaders, by conscious choice or simply by default, generally follow their own, their churches, or their denominations ways, in operating 'their' (but should really be God's!) church.

We (say we) welcome the Holy Spirit during worship, but once it comes to sermon time, we take over, as we believe, consciously or sub-consciously, that the sermon will be of more benefit to our people than the Holy Spirit's ministering. It is likely true that we have spent a lot of time preparing 'our specific word' for our people and surely, it would be criminal not to present it!

The people too, are conditioned to this standard form of the particular church's services, responding positively to the normal routine. 1 Corinthians 14 is often used to justify these methods,

*Orderly Worship*

*26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. (1 Corinthians 14:26-40)*

However, is this the 'leader direction' that God really wants? Is it how the Holy Spirit operates? Should everything be left up to the leader, or leaders?

If you take a closer look at this chapter it is quite clear that there is considerable 'audience participation' in the operation of services. Several people will speak in tongues, others will interpret, while still others will prophecy. What Paul was getting at was not that this should be so controlled so that only the leader/s can speak on behalf of the Holy Spirit. Rather, that

there should simply be orderliness in doing things, with people respecting each other in how and when they do them.

Services then, should be people participatory, as led by the Holy Spirit, not as dictated by the leader of the particular meeting. The Holy Spirit is the teacher and guide of all believers, not just leadership.

Our current system stifles the working of the Holy Spirit amongst the people, to the extent that 'ordinary believers' either believe they have few, or no, spiritual gifts. If they do try to use them, they are all too often 'put in their place' by the church hierarchy. As I move between the worlds of the church and the now, unchurched believers, I sadly yet clearly see both sides of the Christian coin.

While there are some who look for any excuse to leave the church, effectively go back into the world, the majority of the unchurched have been hurt by church leadership when truly led by the Holy Spirit to express views unacceptable to the leaders. They are therefore looking for alternative ways to express their relationship, both personally and in a group, with God.

**There is, almost always, a difference between leadership direction and Holy Spirit guidance.**

## **PRACTICAL EXAMPLES**

1. There is a group of pastors and churches that I have been involved with that grew out of the Latter Rain Revival of the late 1940's.

This movement started out in a classical Holy Spirit way with meetings of people in small groups in homes and halls, led by people with the 5 fold

giftings, but who were simply part of the group and worked at jobs in the community alongside others. A truly grassroots movement, empowered by the Holy Spirit, loved by some and hated by others.

Over the years that followed the movement grew into a denomination. Bible Schools were set up, churches built, and the leaders became 'pastors' in full-time, paid ministry. Now, in most cases, to become a pastor within this grouping, one has to have a theological education.

Many would say that the denomination has come to maturity, for it has a steady membership, a reasonable financial base and does a lot of good work in the community. Very commendable!

There is only one problem! The Holy Spirit anointing that originally, powerfully permeated the movement has largely gone. Man's ways, filled with good intentions, have taken over.

When talking to the few senior people left from the 'old days' of the movement's foundation, there is an almost universal disappointment with the direction things have taken. For they once knew the power of the Holy Spirit as the people met together, a group of equals hungry for the Lord's revelation and desiring to live a life of holiness. While times were tough financially, the movement grew rapidly and people's lives were dramatically changed.

Now things are easier. But the newer leaders know little of the previous, Holy Spirit filled days. They have full time ministry jobs, generally reasonably well paid and a satisfactory career. Membership too has

stagnated and the people themselves simply attend 'a church', a church that does good but one that is lacking in Holy Spirit power.

What went wrong?

2. I was once involved in a church that decided to have 'Holy Spirit meetings' on a Sunday evening. A great idea, embraced by the keen Christians amongst the membership.

So we went along and simply waited upon the Holy Spirit to lead us. It was amazing! He truly turned up! One would get a song, another a word of prophecy, another a message from the Word. There would be testimony, body ministry and healings.

After a couple of months, the (godly) pastor thought that it would be a good idea to use these services as an opportunity for the young people in the church to get experience in ministry. So the services became programmed and organized - and the Holy Spirit departed.

A worthy ideal - but what went wrong?

3. Now for a more personal testimony. I will simply be honest. Take me as you find me.

In Christian terms, I am a very ordinary person. Coming to Christ in middle age and, kicking and struggling, for I come from a Baptist background, into the things of the Holy Spirit, a few years later. I have no formal theological education but a love for the Lord and a openness to the Holy Spirit to teach and change me.

While, in the natural, I have an ability to take complicated things and explain them simply, I have no qualities that would qualify me for ministry. Yet the Lord has used me in that way, not because I am trained, but presumably because I am available. Financially the cost has been great, but there are many others out there who also, have been prepared to sacrifice everything for the Lord.

On most occasions when I speak, the Holy Spirit turns up in a tangible way. It is hard to explain, but He is there, and all present know He is there. About 10+% of the time, He turns up so powerfully that all I can do is let Him minister to the people directly, for He is a far superior minister to me. All my plans 'go out the window' as He takes over.

On the few occasions that He doesn't turn up, experience has taught me it is because the people there don't want Him to! For He is a gentle person and will not come where He is not wanted. It is not what we say with our mouth that is important to Him in such situations, but what we actually believe inside!

An opportunity for Holy Spirit ministry is there every time. But what sometimes goes wrong?

**The Holy Spirit comes when He is both wanted and allowed to operate.**

How then, do we get the Holy Spirit to show up in our gatherings?

The key is very simple in theory but often difficult to achieve in practice.

Experience has shown me the key is **desire**.

There are 2 aspects here. In a church or large group situation, the Holy Spirit is looking for acceptance from.....

**1. LEADERSHIP:** Nearly all pastors and leaders would say that they desire the Holy Spirit's presence in their meetings. But would they - would you - really? Are you prepared to have your well-ordered plans for a fantastic service, ones that you have put so much time, prayer and preparation into during the week, disrupted? Are you prepared to forgo your wonderful sermon in order to let the Holy Spirit minister? Are you prepared to let things get out of your control? And the biggy - are you prepared to forgo tithes and offerings this week because the Holy Spirit has left no room for them in His, likely in your eyes, extremely disorganized, order of service?

When traveling and speaking, I get to go to lots of different churches. Most want what the Lord has to offer through me or they wouldn't have invited me. As I have mentioned, the Holy Spirit normally blesses both me and the group with His presence at these times. However, there are occasional occasions when the leadership of the church involved see things getting 'out of control', from their perspective, and find an excuse to step in to take it back. Very sadly, you can literally feel the Holy Spirit immediately depart.

**2. THE PEOPLE:** As a congregation, we are mostly very comfortable coming along to church for 1 or 2 hours a week to 'do our duty' to God, or maybe our church. We actually quite like order as it is predictable and comfortable, particularly if it speeds up proceedings so that we can more quickly get on with the next activity of the day. Very often, this is where our brain is. It is



often hard to switch off the world and onto God. I am no different. This morning (Sunday) I went to church but found it so difficult to switch off from the 16 hour days I have been working for the past fortnight getting *africa arise* up and running. (Note: This was a few years ago now - David) It is work for God, work He has requested me to do, but it is not relating to God through the Holy Spirit, as He desires me to do. To simply spend time with Him and let Him minister to me.

Again, I have ministered in churches where the people are not interested in the presence of the Holy Spirit being in their midst. I may deliver the same word that the Holy Spirit has come in power to in another church, but because the people are not open to His presence, He simply doesn't show up.

**SMALL GROUPS:** Once again, experience has taught me that The Holy Spirit generally turns up more powerfully in smaller groups than in larger ones. The likely reasons here are firstly, they are generally less structured, often with informal leadership only.

Secondly, the people who attend are generally 'keener believers' who have a greater desire for the things of the Spirit. The group is likely to have less formal expectations of how the meeting should be run and are therefore, more open to the Spirit's intervention.

**The desire for the presence of the Holy Spirit in both leadership and people is a key to His appearance.**

The major problem in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit working in our churches is one of participation. For we see the role of 'attracting' the Holy

Spirit as being the responsibility of leadership. Sadly, in many cases, leadership encourages this wrong idea, effectively trying to restore the Old Testament principle of a priest (pastor) being an intermediary between God and the people.

This is highly unscriptural! For Jesus came to bring a new way, a new priesthood, the 'priesthood of all believers'. Every believer is now to have a direct, personal relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit within each one of us.

Of course, this becomes more difficult, in a practical sense, the larger the church. Put simply, the larger the church, the more spectators there must inevitably be.

This is not God's way! God is seeking a people who are individually sold out to Him with a personal relationship and experience of the Holy Spirit. Under the New Covenant we are all to be 'ministers', not just a privileged few.

However, too often I have seen that when a church member gets closer to God, hearing from Him something different to what the leadership is promoting, the person is ostracized and ridiculed.

In these end, end times of 'hot and cold', there are greater numbers of 'hot' people around, many of whom are leaving the traditional church system as their truly Holy Spirit led ideas are being ignored.

So what is the answer to this problem? Unfortunately the potential solutions are unpalatable to most pastors and leaders.

There are at least two ways of improving the situation

1. Encouraging more people to participate in services.
2. Reducing church sizes to enable greater participation by all.

Both of these ideas fly against conventional wisdom of church leadership. Leaders generally want to restrict 'audience participation' to keep things in good order and under control.

As well, leaders invariably want their church to grow in size, for many reasons. Yet statistics continually show that the most effective churches in evangelizing are new church plants. These hugely outperform well established and large churches in bringing converts to the Lord and also enable more people to participate spiritually.

If we are to develop as a body spiritually, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we need to seek new ways of involving all believers in the spiritual operation of the church. This is a huge and difficult challenge that will require new, lateral thinking from the traditional ways of 'doing church'. May we be led by the Holy Spirit in how to do this.

**We need a revolution in church thinking, where the priorities of God to develop a deeper relationship with all His people and to take His message to the entire world are put ahead of traditional thinking and ambition of leadership.**

## **PERSONAL TESTIMONY**

I simply want to share some of my testimony with you. For I have not always been so keen on the Holy Spirit.

I was brought up in a typical New Zealand Baptist church of the time, where the Holy Spirit was known by name rather than through experience.

My attitudes were typical of my background.

I remember, while at university, being taken to a Pentecostal meeting during a time of revival. I hated it and swore to myself that I would never go again to such a meeting.

A few years later I abandoned the church altogether in favour of the world.

At a moment of desperation in my life, upon bankruptcy many years later, I truly came to accept Jesus as my Saviour and started the ongoing process of making Him Lord also.

At this time my wife, Kathy, was involved with the things of the Holy Spirit, which I again rejected. The Lord had other ideas however! Finally He convicted me (through the Holy Spirit!) that I needed to experience and let the Holy Spirit teach me more.

This revolutionized my life!

From simply understanding the 'words on the page' of the Bible, the Holy Spirit would now reveal the 'words between the lines'. The Bible took on a new depth of meaning that I had previously had no comprehension of.

The Holy Spirit literally wrote the discipleship course, 'Walking With Jesus' while I simply held the pen.

As I grow and mature in His ways He gives the broad revelations that form the foundation of the teachings of this ministry. I then have to research them to fill in the details.

I can testify to the huge difference the release of Holy Spirit power has made in my life. He has brought the Word alive. He has brought me closer to Jesus. He has helped me understand the Father's will for my life more clearly.

**My encouragement, my plea even, is that we all make every effort to restore Holy Spirit power and direction to our personal lives and to the life of your church.**

This is the necessary first step for the transformation of the church.

## **PART 2**

# **THE POWER OF PERSECUTION**

# WHY?

You may well think that this is a very strange topic to place just after increased reliance upon the Holy Spirit, as a necessity for the transformation of the church.

But, reality is, the church thrives and grows through persecution. Jesus was/is a revolutionary. He calls us to get out of the comfort zone of acceptance, both personal and of society, to revolutionize the world for Him.

Jesus was rejected by His generation;

*25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. (Luke 17:25)*

*31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)*

And Stephen, the first martyr of the church.

*The Stoning of Stephen*

*54 When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and*

*cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:54-60)*

For the way of Jesus is not the way of the world nor of our natural human nature.

And also, reality is, whether we like it or not, it takes persecution to sort out the wheat from the chaff, to get those who truly believe to take a life transforming stand for Jesus.

This applied both to the early church, taking persecution in Jerusalem to spread the people and the Word to the then known world, and today, as seen in the huge growth of the church in China.

#### *The Church Persecuted and Scattered*

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

#### *Philip in Samaria*

*4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:1-8)*



All the 12 (11 plus Paul) apostles were martyred for their faith, with the exception of John, who tradition says was boiled in oil and, of course, he ended up on the prison island of Patmos.

*9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 1:9)*

In China today, the leadership of the underground church is very wary of increased prosperity and a reduction of persecution in their country, as they understand the principle that the church expands faster under tough conditions.

Yet we, in the church, all too readily compromise the Word in order to be 'user friendly', in a vain attempt to attract more people, to put more 'bums on seats'. It simply doesn't work.

Of course, we are human, and do not wish to be ridiculed or persecuted by our non-Christian associates - or the government for that matter.

However, if we are seen to be different by outsiders, and we are living Christ-like lives, others will be attracted to the faith. This has been proven again and again throughout history.

*9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices  
10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image  
of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised,  
barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (Colossians 3:9-11)*

**The church of true Christianity is not simply a club of like-minded people meeting on a Sunday for fellowship, but a thriving, living, dynamic organism that draws strength from rejection, ridicule and persecution.**

# DARE TO BE DIFFERENT!

'Walking with Jesus' is not easy! I repeat. Truly walking with Jesus is not easy!

It is not meant to be! For Jesus called His followers to a way of life diametrically opposite to the world's ways. The world cannot understand a message, and behavior, that puts God and others, ahead of oneself.

*8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

'Self**ISH**ness' was born of the fruit, disobediently eaten in the Garden of Eden. It remains the world's way today. The 'self**LESS**ness' of Jesus therefore, is a message the world does not want to hear.

So what does this have to do with persecution?

Everything!

For if we were truly preaching and living 'THE WAY' of Jesus, the world would become polarised towards the church. More would believe, while others would become increasingly antagonistic towards it. Persecution would inevitably increase.

Persecution reflects the reality of our faith. When our faith is 'wishy-washy', the world simply sees us as irrelevant, an anachronism of days past. However, when confronted and challenged by the transforming power of the

true Gospel, people have to make a choice. Embrace it or hate it! There is no middle ground.

When we water down the Gospel, preaching universal love, ignoring the consequences of sin and judgment in order to become socially acceptable, we are alienating both God, and ironically, those we are seeking to attract.

The very last words of Jesus were not spoken at the time of His ascension, but later, in the book of Revelation, through the Apostle John.

His message to the seventh church of Laodicea, generally recognised as being a picture of today's church, was right to the point.

*14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:*

*These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. (Revelation 3:14-18)*

Yes, these final words of Jesus warned us of the calamitous cost of compromise, of having one foot in God and the other in the world. Rejection from His kingdom!

Let us now stand up for Jesus! Show ourselves to be different to the world!  
Teach and live the full Gospel of Jesus!

Yes, we will be persecuted. But, on the other hand, we won't be spat out of His mouth! The cost of compromise is eternal!

*"I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the prophetic words of this book."  
"I am coming soon, and I am bringing my reward to give to everybody depending on what they've done." "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they have the right to the tree of life, and can enter into the city through the gates. Those outside the city are dogs, those who practice witchcraft, those who are sexually immoral, those who murder, those who worship idols, and all those who love and invent lies. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony to share with the churches. I am both the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." "Yes, I am coming soon." (Revelation 22:7-21)*

**Which alternative do you prefer?**

# PERSECUTION STRENGTHENS BELIEF

Persecution is a weapon satan uses to attack believers, but, in the end, it backfires on him. For persecution forces each one of us to make a choice. We either decide that the walk with Jesus is too difficult and slip back into the ways of the world, or our faith is strengthened. With increased faith, our light, formerly 'hidden behind a bushel', shines out to those around us as we truly become a 'light to the world'.

Persecution comes from both outside and within the church.

The earliest recorded case outside the church was that of Stephen.

## *The Stoning of Stephen*

*54 When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. 8 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. (Acts 7:54-8:1)*

The remarkable thing here, repeated in numerous other cases throughout history, is that Stephen did not ask God to save him from death but rather, witnessed to his persecutors.

Persecution continues today on a national scale in countries such as North Korea. Brother Simon of Open Doors reports:

The remarkable thing here, repeated in numerous other cases throughout history, is that Stephen did not ask God to save him from death but rather, witnessed to his persecutors.

Persecution continues today on a national scale in countries such as North Korea. Brother Simon of Open Doors reports:

*Brother Simon, who has contacts with tens of thousands of Christians in North Korea through several networks, is convinced that despite the apparent dangers, at least 200,000 North Koreans are Christians "although that number may be even as high as half a million." One in four Christians in North Korea are believed to be in camps "where people usually do not survive," he said.*

*"In North Korea it is strictly forbidden to be a Christian. Who has a Bible could be sentenced to a punishment camp along with his whole family." He added that refugees deported from China could face at least several years imprisonment. "However if authorities find out the refugee has contact with a Christian he or she may face torture and even execution," Brother Simon added.*

Throughout history, God has also used the persecuted to revitalize the church. Sadly, the participants of each new move of God have, inevitably it seems, been persecuted by those within the church, those with the former anointing. The persecution of the Anabaptists is but one example.

*In the early 16th century, groups of European Christians started splitting from the Roman Catholic Church in what is now known as the Protestant Reformation. But while Protestants and Catholics were at odds, they held one thing in common: Anabaptism had to be eliminated.*

*The Reformed Christians drowned Felix Manz, the first of thousands of Anabaptist martyrs over the next two centuries. The Catholics burned at the stake Michael Sattler, author of the first Anabaptist confession of faith. Even Martin Luther, who is credited with ushering in the Reformation, urged the execution of all Anabaptists as heretics.*

*Such persecution helped drive the early Anabaptists - the spiritual ancestors of today's Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites - into isolation, suspicious of the rest of the world. But now nearly 500 years later, the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches are seeking to make amends. (The Record, Bergen County, NJ, USA)*

**Persecution has been part of the experience of believers since earliest times.**



# TODAY AND THE FUTURE

When it comes to 'the future' in any aspect of Christianity, there are generally as many opinions as there are believers! While I know this is an exaggeration, it makes the point that, in spite of all the prophecy the Bible contains, we really understand very little more than generalities about future events.

When it comes to persecution of the church, everyone would agree that it is going to increase but, in spite of various and varying, often strongly held, views, we don't know specifically what is going to happen.

Reality is, we understand Biblical prophecy far better after it has happened than before! Personally, I think God purposefully designed it that way, for our walk is to be built upon faith and trust in the Lord through all situations of life, both good and bad. If we knew everything we would become arrogant in the extreme!

God however, has made it clear that the further time moves on the greater the clash will be between believers and satan as satan fights a rearguard action before the inevitable triumphant return of Jesus to rule and reign upon the earth.

Our human nature tends towards extremes when faced with such situations. Some are complete prophets of doom, while others grasp hold of any straw to be comforted that such a fate will not befall them. The doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture is a terrible example of this, for it falsely persuades people that there is no need to worry about living the holy and righteous

lives of a disciple now, for we will supernaturally be zapped out of here as soon as the going gets tough! Easy Christianity in the extreme!

Other than having, at best, an very tenuous Biblical justification, being based upon an extreme interpretation of a couple of verses of Scripture, it simply isn't the way God has worked in His dealings with mankind throughout recorded history.

In God, every benefit has a cost. Yes, salvation is free, but in spite of what many preach and teach, living out salvation costs us our life. If we truly are converted, using our jargon, we have to give up our old life in order to live 100% for Him.

*17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

This is the secret to coping with the inevitable persecution promised in the Word. Not that we seek a form of 'magic escapism', but that we answer the call of Jesus to live lives sold out to Him.

*43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.** 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** (Matthew 5:43-48) (Emphasis added)*

**Our life, not escapism, is the ultimate protection against inevitable persecution. Even when it costs us our life. Such is the way of God.**

This has been testified to by martyrs throughout history who pray upon their deathbed, not for rescue, but for their persecutors.

May we never forget:

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10)*

**"Lord, may we be found worthy of you."**

## **PART 3**

### **FROM KINGS TO KINGDOM**

# 'THE WAY'

Once again, I trust that you will not take offence as I write on this difficult subject. Nothing that I write here is personal, but rather, sets out the principles on which God's kingdom is meant to operate. I know many pastors, leaders and people in churches. In fact, I have been known to attend one myself, so am included also! What I am looking at here is the system that has evolved over the 2000 odd years since Jesus walked upon the earth to bring a new way of re-establishing our relationship with God, lost at the time of Adam and Eve's sin. Today 'The Way' is to be built upon direct relationship with the Father, made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus and lived out with guidance from the Holy Spirit.

## *Jesus the Way to the Father*

*5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. 12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

### *Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit*

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." 22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" 23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. 25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. 28 "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. 30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, 31 but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. (John 14:5-31)

Going right back in history to the time of Abraham, we see a man who had a direct relationship to God, hearing personally from Him on numerous occasions.

At the same time, there was upon the earth a mysterious king-priest, by the name of Melchizedek. Jewish tradition says he was Shem the son of Noah, while today, many believe he was a preincarnation of Jesus. While it would appear that he didn't die, he certainly is a 'type of a priest who lives forever'. (Easton Bible Dictionary) Abraham paid him a tithe once, after a successful battle. As Abraham was a nomad and Melchizedek likely lived around the Jerusalem area, their paths probably didn't cross very often. Abraham's primary relationship was with the Father and he received his visions and instructions directly from the Father.

#### *Melchizedek the Priest*

7     *This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace."* 3 *Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. 4 Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. 6 This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. 8 In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. 9 One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, 10 because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. (Hebrews 7:1-7)*

Time went on and when the people finally came out of Egypt they were initially led as a unified nation by Moses and Joshua, both, in different ways, types of Jesus.

These men were not kings nor priests, but prophets, ones whom again had a direct relationship with God.

After the death of Joshua, the individual tribes went their own ways. From time to time God would raise up judges at a tribal level, to deal with emergency situations the people got themselves in to. Finally the people decided that having a permanent king, like the surrounding nations had, would serve them better than waiting upon God appointed judges, to resolve their problems. Samuel was not pleased. Nor was God! However God reluctantly acceded to their request, all the time knowing the trouble it would get the people in to.

#### *Israel Asks for a King*

8 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. 2 The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. 3 But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. 4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." 6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. 9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do." 10 Samuel told all



*the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. 12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. 15 He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. 16 Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. 17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. 18 When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day." 19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. 22 The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Everyone go back to his town." (1 Samuel 8:1-22)*

So we now had a situation where priesthood and kingship were separated, with King Saul and the Aaronic priesthood fulfilling different roles in society. Both good and bad kings and priests followed but the end result by the time Jesus came was that the people had been expelled from their land with only a remnant returning, and by the time of Jesus, under Roman rule.

To summarise, the nation of Israel had passed through 2 kingdom ages. In the first kingdom age there was a king-priest in the form of Melchizedek while during the second kingdom age the kingship and the priesthood were separated.

Nothing controversial so far.

But it was soon to come! Jesus came as a radical to turn the world upside down! Ongoing controversy between the ways of Jesus and the established religious and governmental systems has been the normal situation ever since!

### *Seven Woes*

*23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' 8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. 13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. 15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. 16 "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' 17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? 18 You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' 19*

*You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. 22 And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. 23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. 25 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. 27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. 29 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30 And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! 33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? 34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. 35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, your*

*house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"* (Matthew 23:1-39)

The most remarkable thing about the ministry of Jesus was that He led by example but did not rule in the way we, as human leaders, like to do.

Satan endeavored to tempt Jesus, effectively the same way he succeeded in tempting Adam and Eve - to take power and control over the world. With Adam and Eve, their world was a garden, for Jesus, the whole earth.

Adam and Eve forsook fellowship with God in return for power now. Jesus did not.

#### *The Temptation of Jesus*

*4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:1-11)*

Jesus did not have any followers! What a statement to make!

If we analyse the Scriptures carefully, we will see that Jesus always referred to those who sought to follow Him as brethren. They were known as sons (including male and female) of God or of the Father, or sons of the kingdom but never Jesus' sons.

When the people tried to make Jesus 'king' on Palm Sunday, He simply left town, choosing to go to Bethany rather than lead an insurrection.

*37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. (Matthew 7:37-8a)*

Many think Jesus was simply being humble when He continually gave all the credit for what He did to the Father. He didn't glorify Himself. All glory was given to the Father. But the reality is that His submission to and glorification of the Father was the very heart of His ministry.

As prophesied by Isaiah, Jesus was to come not as a ruler, but as a servant!

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. 2 He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. 3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." (Isaiah 42:1-4)*

Jesus came as God the Father's suffering servant, to do the work of the Father and give glory to Him.

### *The Suffering and Glory of the Servant*

*13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. 14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness— 15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand. (Isaiah 52:13-15)*

**Jesus came, not to rule, but as the servant of the Father to do the Father's will, giving the Father all the glory for everything He did.**

# THE EARLY CHURCH

The early church was initially quite small, often like house groups today, meeting in different cities and towns throughout the region.

Unlike the established Jewish system with its hierarchy of priests and rabbis who made their living out of the tithes and offerings of the people, the fledgling churches, as far as we are aware, had no paid local leadership. All believers were considered to be 'brothers' (including sisters!) and the focus was upon the leadership of Christ.

There were travelling ministries whom the local church supported when required. Of course, at this time there was no printed New Testament. The only ways believers could learn more of the teachings of Jesus was through itinerant ministries or the letters and writings of those who had been with Jesus during His life, or as in the case of Paul, through the miraculous meeting on the road to Amaeus.

## *Saul's Conversion*

9      *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his*

*eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9:1-9)*

Paul is the most comprehensive example we have of early Christian leadership. From what we know or can glean he wasn't an impressive person in appearance or eloquent of speech. But he was an excellent writer. God chose the author of much of the New Testament well!

His ministry trips took years rather the days we relate to today. He would stay in an area for considerable lengths of time. While he would accept gifts from the people, he did not expect them. In fact, through his trade of tent making, he took great pains not to be a burden upon the local believers, making tents and selling them to pay his own living expenses.

Probably the best understanding of his motivation comes in the introductions to his various letters. Paul was an apostle, appointed by Jesus himself! The highest appointment recommendation one could get! Yet, let's look at how he introduced himself in his writings.

*"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God", "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God", "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God", "Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father", "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,", "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus", Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God", "Paul, Silas and Timothy", "Paul, Silas and Timothy", "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ", "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus".*

Paul would describe his apostolic role, but not once did he ascribe himself a title.



It is also interesting to see the development through the books as they are printed in the Bible. In the early books he describes himself as an apostle, then as one working with others, next a servant, and finally as a prisoner (both literal and spiritual!). What a progression and the opposite of what we generally see today.

**As Paul grew in the Lord, the more humble he became! Truly a lesson for us all!**

Very early on, the challenges of growth brought about practical problems leading to a 'division of labour' within the running of the church.

*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:1-4)*

As we progress through the New Testament we start to see conflict arising between people and, in a very human way, people trying to gain influence over others. Paul liked to preach and teach about Jesus, but you get the feeling that he experienced frustration as he increasingly had to spend more and more time sorting out differences between people, dealing with both heresies and behavioral problems that quickly crept into the fledgling churches.

*By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! 2 I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. (2 Corinthians 10:1-2)*

As mentioned earlier, writing was Paul's real strength. He was not an attractive person, nor a great orator, qualities we all too often look to in leadership today - and no doubt, then also. We still fall for the 'King Saul syndrome', that has been a failure from the earliest of times! Paul was not a great leader in a worldly sense yet his influence through writing Scripture has seen (God through) him have more influence on history than almost any other, except Jesus Himself, before or since. His words have been read and contemplated by millions and now billions over the past 2000 odd years. Amazing!

He was humble;

*9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Corinthians 15:9)*

yet was sure in, and worked tirelessly at, His calling.

*10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11 Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:10-11)*

**For Paul, Jesus was everything and he was nothing.**

He ultimately gave his life in the natural too, as he had done in the spiritual, being executed in Rome around 67AD.

# RELATIONSHIPS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The emphasis in the early church was upon 'brotherhood' (including sisters). This often seems quaint to us today, or we associate it with groups such as lodges or the Klu Klux Klan.

But the real concept of 'brotherhood' is that of family. In the natural we are born into a family. Brothers and sisters share the genes of their parents. Some are older. Some are younger. Some are natural leaders, some aren't. But all are family. In a functional family, all are one. All support each other when the 'chips are down'. There is no formal hierarchy for we are all of the same parentage.

With the coming of Jesus this is the same in the spiritual also.

We are spiritual 'sons' of God

*26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-8)*

and 'brothers' of Jesus.

*10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are*

*of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Hebrews 2:10-11)*

Constantly throughout the New Testament fellow believers, as a group, are referred to as brothers. For example;

*9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)*

When it came to speaking about individuals, it was natural to call them 'brothers'.

*15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. (2 Peter 3:15)*

What is important to note here is that Paul is NOT referred to as 'Brother Paul' but as our brother whose name is Paul. For that is how it is in a family, how it is with our own brothers and sisters. We don't refer to our brothers and sisters as Brother Bill or Sister Sue, but simply as Bill and Sue, our brother and sister.

While this may seem pedantic to some, the reality is that this principle contains a very basic truth which we have lost sight of in the church from very early times, as we will see as we continue our discussion.

**We are all one as children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus.**

In a sense we have got a little ahead of ourselves, but it was deliberate.

Now, having looked at Paul, whom we often try to use to justify hierarchy, let's go back and look at his inspiration and role model, Jesus.

*Remember how we saw that we were spiritual sons of God (Galatians 3:26-8) and brothers and sisters of Jesus. (Hebrews 2:10-11)*

Jesus had a natural family, with siblings, at least some of whom didn't believe in His divinity until after His death.

But during the time of His ministry, He developed a spiritual family of people from diverse backgrounds, including the men whom we know as the disciples or apostles, along with women such as Mary and Martha, who were close friends, financial supporters and travelling companions.

*46 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. 47 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." 48 He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)*

Religionists throughout history have had great difficulty in accepting that Jesus is our brother as well as our savior, placing Him on a high, unapproachable pedestal, worshipping statues rather than developing a brotherly, family bond with Him.

*14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of*

*death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18)*

One of the defining ways that we can see and understand the transition from the Old Covenant to the New is that under the New, titles ceased as the spiritual family of 'Christians' developed.

The hierarchical system ended with the political 'High Priest Caiaphas' who succeeded the 'High Priest Annas'. The most likely, last true spiritual high priest, 'John the Baptist', (the final man with a title) passed the baton of the priesthood from the Old Covenant priesthood of Aaron to the New Covenant priesthood of all believers who accept salvation through Jesus.

*4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has **made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:4-6)*

Jesus gathered a group of 12 men around Him, who were charged with carrying on the work after He departed. One reneged (Judas) and was incorrectly replaced by another (Matthias) using Old Covenant method of casting lots, rather than waiting upon Jesus to do it His way. We saw this in Jesus' miraculous personal appearance to the remaining disciples arch enemy, Paul! As the eleven understood, a qualification to be one of the 12

was to have been chosen by and been with Jesus. They could not, in the natural, see how this could happen again once Jesus had ascended to heaven. But God works in amazing ways!

Jesus treated His close group of followers as spiritual brothers and sisters. He called them by their Christian names and they did the same of Him. No titles were given either way, although Jesus was the recognized leader of the group.

When the disciples tried to reintroduce the concept of hierarchy, which they had been brought up with under the Old Covenant, and of which titles are a natural consequence, Jesus soundly rebuked them.

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:1-4)*

**The greatest in Heaven are the truly humble spiritual family of Jesus, not those bearing religious titles.**

# THE CHURCHES OF REVELATION

The New Testament was written during the 1st century AD.

During much of this time, in many places, the church was under persecution and often forced to operate underground, as indeed the majority of the Chinese church has to today.

However, from reading about the 7 churches of Revelation, it is obvious that many of the problems that beset the church today had already developed, even in the relatively few years that had elapsed after the death of Jesus. The length of time depends upon whether you believe Revelation was written before AD70 or 95-6AD.

If we also believe that John was dictating the words of Jesus (and in my online Bible they are printed in red as being personal quotations), it is obvious that Jesus was generally not happy with the direction most of the churches were taking. While He was generally gracious to pay a compliment first, He then made directional comments and warnings before finishing with a positive statement confirming the future blessing of those who obeyed Him. The amazing depth of these progressive promises is explained in the free download REVELATION'S REVELATION found in the MORE FREE DOWNLODS section of the [www.wwj.org.nz](http://www.wwj.org.nz) website.

We will now start looking at the 7 churches, starting with the 5 that were roundly criticised and later the 2 that were complimented.

## THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS



He praised the people for their perseverance and endurance of hardships. Surely they must be hard out for God then? But no! Let's look at what Jesus said next.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. (Revelation2:4-5)

Wow! Harsh words! The lampstand is symbolic of the 7 candled or lamped Minora that was found in the Holy Place in the Tabernacle of Moses. The lampstand speaks of spiritual gifts that God gives to His people through the Holy Spirit. See the teaching A REVELATION OF..... THE AMAZING TABERNACLE OF MOSES, also in the MORE FREE DOWNLODS section of the [www.wwj.org.nz](http://www.wwj.org.nz) website.

So the Lord, as with all these churches, was not threatening to remove the people's salvation, but rather, the withdrawing the power of Holy Spirit anointing from them.

I want to clarify a point. My motive in writing this series is not to denigrate the church as some think. In modern idiom, 'to throw out the baby with the bath water'! No. My heart's desire is to see the church come into the fullness of what God has for it. To replace the dirty bathwater with pure clean, living water, so that the baby may grow and mature into a church whose light will truly shine in a world that is getting darker by the day. A renewed church, operating in the will of the Father through the power and instruction of the Holy Spirit, taking the message of salvation through Jesus to the whole world. For this to happen, change is required.

Here in Ephesus, the people who started out loving the Lord wholeheartedly had, through persecution and hardship become strivers, not in God's power, but in their own. Today we admire people living in places of hardship and persecution, yet where they do not lose their faith in spite of the mistreatment they receive.

The people of Ephesus had changed focus from God to survival, one based on their own strength rather than the power of God. While this is highly understandable from a human perspective, it is not God's way. We can appear to be doing great things, yet if they are in our own strength, they are not great in God's sight.

**If we don't do things the Lord's way rather than our own, He will remove the full power of Holy Spirit anointing from us.**

## **THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUN**

This describes a most interesting situation, where even a church that withstands persecution, can still go astray.

Jesus chides the people for going back to Old Testament ways. And not just the 'good' ways, but the bad, that of being misled by the false prophet Balaam and of the Nicolaitans, whose teaching was similar.

Balaam was hired by Balak, the Moabite king, (symbolic of the world) to curse the Israelites. Balaam was an interesting man who heard from God yet loved the pleasures of the world more. God told him not to do Balak's will. Balaam had a huge internal battle before finally compromising and setting

off on his donkey. We all know that God tried to reach him again through his uncooperative, 4 legged transportation!

In his general letter, Simon Peter succinctly described prophets, both then and now who, like Balaam, succumb to greed.

*12 But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. 13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. 14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! 15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness. (2 Peter 2:12-16)*

And described their fate!

*17 These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. 20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud." (2 Peter 2:17-22)*

Prophets are NOT TO ACCEPT MONEY OR GIFTS for the use of their prophetic gift, for the gift is not their own, but belongs to God! Inevitably they will lead people into sin, either physical or spiritual adultery.

Prophets beware!

*2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. (2 Peter 2:2)*

People beware!

**We must be very careful to be discerning and not follow prophets who use God's gift to acquire the pleasures of this world.**

## **THE CHURCH IN THYRATIRA**

This church was making progress.

*19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. (Revelation 2:19)*

However, as with many churches today, it contained at least two groups of theologically different people. Part of the church, perhaps the majority, were apostate;

*20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely,*

*unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. (Revelation 2:20-23)*

while a remnant were faithful to the 'Word' of the letters Paul and others distributed and the travelling true teachers' teachings.

*24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): 25 Only hold on to what you have until I come. (Revelation 2:24-5)*

There are two views about the person of Jezebel here. One is that there was a lady of that name in the local church there while the second, and more likely view is that the statement is allegorical, referring to the traits of the first Jezebel, the weak King Abab's wife. It doesn't really matter though, for the message Jesus is bringing.

**JEZEBEL** — *chaste, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Zidonians, and the wife of Ahab, the king of Israel (1 Kings 16:31). This was the "first time that a king of Israel had allied himself by marriage with a heathen princess; and the alliance was in this case of a peculiarly disastrous kind. Jezebel has stamped her name on history as the representative of all that is designing, crafty, malicious, revengeful, and cruel. She is the first great instigator of persecution against the saints of God. Guided by no principle, restrained by no fear of either God or man, passionate in her attachment to her heathen worship, she spared no pains to maintain idolatry around her in all its splendour. Four hundred and fifty prophets ministered under her care to Baal, besides four hundred prophets of the groves [R.V., 'prophets of the Asherah'], which ate at her table (1 Kings 18:19). The idolatry, too, was of the most debased and sensual kind." Her conduct was in many respects very disastrous to the kingdom both of Israel and Judah (21:1-29). At length she came to an*

*untimely end. As Jehu rode into the gates of Jezreel, she looked out at the window of the palace, and said, "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" He looked up and called to her chamberlains, who instantly threw her from the window, so that she was dashed in pieces on the street, and his horses trod her under their feet. She was immediately consumed by the dogs of the street (2 Kings 9:7–37), according to the word of Elijah the Tishbite (1 Kings 21:19).*

*Her name afterwards came to be used as the synonym for a wicked woman (Rev. 2:20).*

*It may be noted that she is said to have been the grand-aunt of Dido, the founder of Carthage.<sup>1</sup>*

- 1. Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., Easton's Bible Dictionary, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.*

Ironically for someone whose name means 'chaste', she epitomises evil influence within the church, as we can see in the Thyratiran church.

In this instance she, or people within the church, were promoting immorality, idolatry, and non-Biblical theology.

Then, and today, false unbiblical teachings were promoting the ways and values of a selfish, manipulative, fallen world, within the church.

The message to the church in Thyatira, and to us today, is to be so careful that the church and our lives are based upon godly values, not those of the society within which we live.

There are aspects of theology over which we will disagree. That does not make you or me a Jezebel. However, there are also foundational Biblical

principles of discipleship. Throughout history, as seems to be the case in this church, the true ways of God as modeled and taught by Jesus, and personally revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, are lived by a remnant only.

May each one of us be careful to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, seeking daily to become more like Him.

**As Christians, we are to be seen to be different to the people of the world.**

## **THE CHURCH IN SARDIS**

Sardis was an ancient city of Lydia, on the banks of the mountain Tmolus. Likely to have been the chief city of Asia the Less, it was the first city in that part of the world to be converted by the preaching of John. Likely also to have been the first to revolt from Christianity, and today lies in ruins.

*These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. (Revelation 3:1-3)*

Here we have a superficially successful church with a great reputation, but one that is relying upon past glory for its present ministry.

As the first city of the area to be converted, we can well imagine how vibrant and enthusiastic the original believers would have been.

Yet, over time, the initial enthusiasm waned and the work of the church reduced from substance to form. It had become a dead church living on its past reputation.

This can so easily happen to us, both as individual believers and in the life cycle of the church. There is a saying that 'familiarity breeds contempt' and while this sounds harsh in relation to God, it can all too easily become our reality.

This can so easily happen to us, both as individual believers and in the life cycle of the church. There is a saying that 'familiarity breeds contempt' and while this sounds harsh in relation to God, it can all too easily become our reality.

Why is this? I believe the major reason is that we place limits upon our relationship with God. Once we stop seeking more of Him, we actually experience less! For faith is like a pendulum swinging. We are either going on in Him or we are going backwards. We cannot stand still.

This is as true for a church as it is for us individually. Churches are generally founded by an enthusiastic group keen to reach out into their community. God is truly relied upon as He is necessary to the equation! However, over an amazingly sort time, Gods ways become methods and then tradition. We learn how to 'do church'.

Experience has taught me that God is a God of change. While He never changes, He requires us to change, step by step, into the image of Jesus. While I don't know about you, I suspect you are the same as me, having some way to go yet to become like Jesus!



So too does the church, in order to become the pure, spotless bride for which Jesus is returning. He won't come until we are! We determine the time of His return by our preparation. If we are not ready, if our robe is soiled, He will wait for another generation. Sobering, isn't it!

Yet there were again in the Sardis church a remnant who were not simply believers, but true disciples, as has been the case down through the ages.

*4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. (Revelation 3:4)*

To which group do you belong?

**God is seeking people and churches who are completely sold out to Him.**

## **THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA**

*We now come to the last and worst of all the seven Asian churches, the reverse of the church of Philadelphia; for, as there was nothing reproved in that, here is nothing commended in this, and yet this was one of the seven golden candlesticks, for a corrupt church may still be a church. Here we have, as before,*

*I. The inscription, to whom, and from whom.*

*1. To whom: To the angel of the church of Laodicea. This was a once famous city near the river Lycus, had a wall of vast compass, and three marble theatres, and, like Rome, was built on seven hills. It seems, the apostle Paul was very instrumental in planting the gospel in this city, from which he wrote a letter, as he mentions in the epistle to the Colossians, the last chapter, in which he sends salutations to them, Laodicea not being above twenty miles distant from Colosse. In*

*this city was held a council in the fourth century, but it has been long since demolished, and lies in its ruins to this day, an awful monument of the wrath of the Lamb. 1.*

*1. Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.*

The church at Laodicea is regarded by many as being symbolic of the church of today, as it was the 7th of seven churches mentioned, therefore applicable to the end times in which we now live. Shockingly, it was, as other commentaries state, the worst of all the churches. Sobering isn't it?

Let's read what Jesus had to say:

*These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. (Revelation 3:14-17)*

The church today, particularly in the West, is wealthier than at any other time in history. The pernicious prosperity doctrine is preached by many in the false hope of becoming even richer. Sadly, as I have experienced, the poor throughout the world, are all too often exploited to give what little they have in a desperate bid to escape their poverty. The only ones who end up getting rich are the preachers and promoters of this false doctrine.

Wealth leads to independence, to self-reliance, as we no longer need to rely upon God for our material needs.

Jesus tells us here that really, in spite of our self-confidence, the people of Laodicea, and we by implication, are actually *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*.!

This is truly a hard message to get across, for the magnetic attraction of materialism is so hugely powerful in our lives. We are indoctrinated on a daily basis through the media, peer pressure and in many other subtle ways.

Rich churches today are regarded as having received the blessing of God. Such was the Laodicean church. Jesus did not agree!

Kathy and I are shifting house to a rented 2 bedroom unit, from our current, relatively small by New Zealand standards, 3 bedroom house. Over the past few years we have given away all the money we had, not that it was a lot, and now only own our household possessions. These too, we have tried to minimise. Yet now that it is time to shift again, we find we still have far too much 'stuff', much of which has been stored away since our last shift, 2 1/2 years ago! Just in case we needed it!

Moving into a small unit will force us to downsize once again. But it isn't easy in the society in which we live, where people are judged by the possessions they have. Sadly, even amongst Christians.

I am not saying that our choice of a (relatively) minimalist lifestyle is the only way to go to get nearer to God. Nor, necessarily, what you should do. However we, along with many millions of others, particularly in the Third World, do understand the meaning of the Lord's (disciples) Prayer when it says,

*11 Give us today our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)*

As we move to look at the successful churches that Jesus commended, we will see that their values and situations were very different to those which we regard as being 'successful' in the church today.

How much we need to be reminded of the Parable of the Rich Fool so that we don't meet his fate.

**God desires for us to be dependent upon Him for our provision.**

## **TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA**

*8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:*

*These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. (Revelation 2:8-10a)*

The church is poor. Of course we all know that poverty means that we aren't receiving the blessing of God, don't we? That is what prosperity teachers preach and is the prevailing belief of most Christians, without a doubt! Whether travelling in countries, rich or poor, ministering to rich churches or poor, almost without exception, the concept of material blessing being a sign of God's favour is a fundamental belief.

Yes, we humanise so many things. In a worldly sense it is better to be rich than poor. Personally I have known both extremes twice in my life, having been a millionaire, then a bankrupt, and repeating the experience. Humanly speaking it is nicer to have money than not to have it! Even in the human view of the spiritual, one is able to support and help others far more when you have the means to do so.

Yet, in the end, as we can see in the church at Smyrna, God is looking for something different. The first and foremost thing is a deep personal relationship with you and with me. His desire is for us to have a full trust in, and dependence upon, Him.

As we found out last week, this wasn't happening at the richest of the 7 churches, the one that mankind would view as the most successful, that at Laodicea. Jesus, in fact saved His most scathing criticism for these seemingly successful, self-confident people. I have been privileged to visit many churches, both rich and poor. Almost all those who are rich are super confident that what they are doing is God's way, when usually it is patently obvious that it is not. The worship may be technically superb with an apparent anointing created by excellence. The preaching is likely to have good content and be well presented by a powerful orator and leader of people. On the surface, all appears to be brilliant, a superbly stage managed presentation to gladden the hearts and lift the spirits of the congregation. Then enters the Holy Spirit! He wants to do things His way. Oops! He is going to upset our perfect church! I will let you muse over the end result for yourself!

On a personal level, I can testify that I have got far closer to God in times of bankruptcy than in times of plenty. My first bankruptcy brought me 'to' Jesus, my second took my 'into' Jesus. There is a huge difference.

After the first bankruptcy God restored business success. At this time I held the pen while the Holy Spirit wrote the 'Walking With Jesus' discipleship course. I was able to print and distribute 6,000 copies free of charge to people in New Zealand and worldwide, all from the profits of the business. Amazing - yes! Helping others - yes! Spreading the Word - yes! Successful and blessed by God - yes! Was I confident in God? Yes!

Then a second bankruptcy! One created by a lack of wisdom in trying to provide funds for myself to enter full time ministry without being a burden on others. A laudable goal? In a human sense - yes! In God's plan - no, and no again!

For you see, He wanted me to rely fully upon Him. Not only in the material, but also in the spiritual. So He took me through a wilderness experience of 5+ years. He gave me revelation and understanding that no one wanted to hear. It was a lonely walk, battering my head again and again against a brick wall. "God, am I right or wrong? Is it really you Lord, or my fertile imagination? Lord, why will nobody understand! Lord, I have given up everything for you, I have immersed myself in your Word, yet I am rejected seemingly everywhere."

I even ministered overseas, being listened to politely, but not really understood.

It was not until my third trip to Africa that things changed. Tired after a 14 hour flight, I was taken off the plane to a meeting my friend was running. I will never forget that day! There was a Singaporean speaking. I wanted to go to sleep, but when I heard His words, I immediately awoke! Here, for the first time in, by now 7 years, I heard someone else speaking out the same revelation that I had been given! What a relief! "Lord, it is not just me! Thank you Lord!"

Over the next few days I met a number of people who had also had a similar understanding. Upon speaking to them, without exception, all had been through a wilderness period, a period of rejection, a time of death to self, before coming back into ministry at a new, far deeper level than they had been at previously.

On my last trip through South Africa, a trip of faith on 50 cents a day, I found that there were now churches whose people were starting to understand, and trying to live, the life of being sold out to God. Not in the rich churches, but in those in some of the poorer areas of the country. These are the ones who are most receptive to God's desires as they have little else to rely upon.

Unlike the church in Smyrna, and those in some parts of the world today, most of us are unlikely to die for our beliefs. Yet God does require each of us to die - to die to our human nature and grow into His.

None of us have fully achieved this yet. Just ask my wife Kathy! As Paul said,

*12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers,*

*I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)*

The people of Smyrna had nothing materially. They were persecuted. They were ridiculed. They were likely to die for their faith. Yet, spiritually, in their faithfulness, they had everything! And were given the promise:

*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 10b)*

**God, above all, desires us to be fully reliant upon Him**

## **THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA**

*7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:*

*These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. (Revelation 3:7-9)*

Here we have another church that wouldn't seem successful in today's terms. Success today is regarded as being strong, confident, with a super faith that will get one through all situations and challenges in life. Yet, very often, this 'strength' is grounded in human maxims of success rather than godly principles. Strength in self rather than total reliance upon God!



To truly 'go up' in God, one must first 'go down' in self.

One of the lessons I have had to learn, being a reasonably capable, naturally confident person, is to let go of my own strength in order to do things under God's instruction. Having heaps of energy, I am always tempted to try and make things happen in God.

While human effort may seem to work in the short term, it will inevitably lead to spiritual, and likely, worldly disaster. As mentioned last week, an attempt, in my own strength, to set Kathy and I up financially through building 12 houses to rent so that we wouldn't have to rely upon others in the fulltime ministry being called to, ended in disaster! In reality, I was trying to make myself independent of God. For He is to be our provider.

Of course, God had the last laugh, for the project backfired. I went bankrupt and now genuinely need to pray each day,

*11 Give us today our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)*

Yes, in Philadelphia they had little strength, yet they kept God's Word and did not deny His name.

Also, as one commentator put it,

*This church has opposition from the false church (synagogue of Satan), the counterfeits. These false brethren claim to be the church and oppose the ministry of God's people, but Christ promises to bring them to their knees. The false church has popularity, influence, and money, but it must one day bow before the few saints of God who take the truth to the world.*

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

All too often today, the churches with popularity, influence and money are regarded as the successful true church. Yet, according to Jesus, the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia which were poor and persecuted, lacking in human strength and ridiculed, were those that He was pleased with. Yet, as the commentator says, *it must one day bow before the few saints of God who take the truth to the world.*

Maybe then we too, will receive the reward of the Philadelphians;

*11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Revelation 3:11-13)*

Worth musing upon, isn't it?

**Jesus desires us to work in His strength, not our own.**

## **THE CRITICISED CHURCHES**

We will firstly summarise the aspects of the five churches that Jesus criticised as operating as 'kings' rather than 'kingdom'.

The root of the problems in the Revelation churches, and still today, can be seen developing way back in the early days of Israel, where the people asked Samuel for a king, so that they would be like the people around them. Both God and Samuel objected then, as God still does now.

*6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. 9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do." (1 Samuel 8:6-9)*

God, then and now, wants to lead His people personally, not through human intermediaries. Although God acceded to the people's wishes it was not the best way. King Saul set the pattern of what was to come. David was an improvement, but still far from perfect, while Solomon who started out with everything, ended up walking away from God, seduced by the world. Little has changed today!

Let's summarise the 5 churches criticised by Jesus.

The people of **Ephesus** had changed focus from God to survival, one based on their own strength rather than the power of God. While this is highly understandable from a human perspective, it is not God's way. We can appear to be doing great things, yet if they are in our own strength, they are not great in God's sight.

**If we don't do things the Lord's way rather than our own, He will remove the full power of Holy Spirit anointing from us.**

Two lessons from **Pergamum**. Prophets are NOT TO ACCEPT MONEY OR GIFTS for the use of their prophetic gift, for the gift is not their own, but belongs to God! Inevitably they will lead people into sin, either physical or spiritual adultery.

Prophets beware! People beware!

We must be very careful to be discerning and not follow prophets who use God's gift to acquire the pleasures of this world.

God is a personal God to each and every one of us, if we will only search Him out individually. He desires a unique relationship with you and with me, not a second hand one through another, irrespective of how godly that person may be.

If we insist in following the old ' Nicolaitan' ways of following a church leader instead of God we will be punished.

**As Jesus said to the church at Pergamum licentiousness, both physical and spiritual, will not be tolerated in His church.**

Then, and today, false unbiblical teachings were promoting the ways and values of a selfish, manipulative, fallen world, within the church.

The message to the church in **Thyatira**, and to us today, is to be so careful that the church and our lives are based upon godly values, not those of the society within which we live.

May each one of us be careful to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, seeking daily to become more like Him.

**As Christians, we are to be seen to be different to the people of the world.**

The church, very grey today, is to become the pure, spotless bride for which Jesus is returning. He won't come until we are! We determine the time of His return by our preparation. If we are not ready, if our robe is soiled, He will wait for another generation.

Sobering, isn't it!

Finally, the church in **Laodicea**, generally regarded as being a picture of today's church. A church with a lukewarm faith, brought about by riches that lead to self-sufficiency.

How much we need to be reminded of the Parable of the Rich Fool so that we don't meet his fate.

*You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."(Luke 12:20-21)*

**God desires for us to be dependent upon Him for our provision.**

We all (including me!) need to continually take heed of the warnings Jesus gave to these 5 churches. For we so easily fall into the very human traps that they did.

Jesus is returning for a 'pure spotless bride'. This is a church that will 100% do the will of the Father, following the example of Jesus through the leading of the Holy Spirit. A kingdom church, quite different to the one we know today, for it will be Spirit, not being people (king) led.

I realise this sounds idealistic and impossible to achieve. In our own strength, past experience and understanding, it is! Yet this is the church for which Jesus will return.

*6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)*

Amen.

## THE PRAISED CHURCHES

*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 10b)*

The people of **Smyrna** had nothing materially. They were persecuted. They were ridiculed. They were likely to die for their faith. Yet, spiritually, in their faithfulness, they had everything! And were given the promise:

*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.  
(Revelation 10b)*

I have a heart for the church. I was brought up in a Baptist church. I was a 'good churchian' until my early 30's. It was even suggested that I should go to Baptist College and train to be a Minister. Yet I knew what was really in my heart.

After a bad experience in the church I attended, I threw away all the 'pretense' of my churchianity and went out into the world for 10 years or so. It wasn't until I faced the implications of bankruptcy that I truly gave my heart to Jesus.

Back in the church I absorbed all my traditional Baptist church had to offer. I became filled with the Holy Spirit and absorbed all the Pentecostal church had to offer. But in my heart I knew there was more. Then the Lord gave me the revelation of Revelation 12:11, upon which Walking with Jesus Ministries is based.

*11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus - Passover - Traditional and Evangelical churches) and by the word of their testimony; (Holy Spirit - Pentecost - Pentecostal and Charismatic churches) **they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.** (The Father - Tabernacles - End Time - kingdom - Church) (Revelation 12:11)*

A church which in the Bible described as the overcomers, the bride, the double anointing, and more. A people sold out to God, 100% doing the Father's will, leading to spiritual death of our human nature putting on the nature of God as modeled in Jesus, being prepared to die physically also for God, as Jesus did for us.

Yes, I have been called a dreamer, and worse things!

Yet, as we can see in the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, the characteristics of the churches Jesus praised are not those desired by most of the church, then and now. Principles of sacrifice, faithfulness, full reliance upon and submission to the will of God. Something to consider next.



# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH

The above are principles we hear about in church. They are generally understood though, as being sacrifice (giving to and helping in the church), faithfulness (attending church and meetings of the church), reliance upon (the pastor or leadership), and submission to the will of God (as revealed through the vision of the pastor).

However, these are principles of 'kings' not 'kingdom'.

Let's go right back again to God's reluctant appointment of Israel's first king, King Saul. God warned the people:

*10 Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. 12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. 15 He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. 16 Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. 17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. (1 Samuel 8:10-17)*

Of course, when we read this, we automatically think of ancient times with kings in crowns and robes leading foot soldiers into battle riding on a chariot pulled by horses. A king who had the power of life and death over his subjects. An autocratic leader whose word was law.

This is true. The situation today generally is different. We are more educated, most live in democracies, and we pride ourselves upon our independence. We say our government is 'of the people, by the people, for the people', the definition of democracy. However, we also know that the ideal does not always relate to the practice. Enough said!

When we look at church history through the ages, we see that the principle of kingship remains entrenched within the church. In fact, the darkest age of both church and society was in the days of the highly autocratic Papal system of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Much of the thrust of the Reformation was an attempt to break this rigid authority structure. However, after initial times of revelation and change, denominational structures again grew. Over the hundreds of years since then, God has used many different groups of 'dissenters' to further reform His church. Each group has received revelation from God, which they invariably, have taken to be the last and greatest revelation, and stuck with it through thick and thin, forming another structured grouping of 'spiritual kings' with their 'member subjects'. It is a truism that the greatest enemy of a new revival is the leadership of the previous one.

Sadly, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early 20th century, giving rise to the Pentecostal movement, this imposition of 'kingly structures' has

become even more pronounced than in the traditional and evangelical churches that grew out of the reformation.

The spiritual giftings of leadership have been used and abused to put the people down rather than being used as instruments to grow and develop the congregation.

We need to see what God said about such behavior, way back in the time of Samuel.

*6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. (1 Samuel 8:6-7)*

Reality is, 'religion' needs and breeds kings and structure, for ironically, that is what people want! 'Kingdom' though, is based on entirely different principles.

The heart of the problem of the church is mankind's (in particular 'menkind'!) desire to be organised and in our ability to compartmentalise areas of our lives.

'Religion' is based upon what people want to hear. Perform a particular, proven ritual in this specific way and you will be okay, irrespective of whatever else you do.

In a Christian setting, the extreme of this religious activity was found in the latter Middle Ages when 'indulgences' were sold by the priests of the church for money, as a means of obtaining forgiveness of sins. The excesses of this

unbiblical religious action, based upon appealing to natural human instinct, was a huge motivating factor in the protestations of the Protestant Reformation.

However, it did not take long for the protestants to set up their own 'religious systems' of beliefs which, while more enlightened than the practice of indulgences, still organised people into 'doing religion' in certain defined ways. 'Follow our way and all will be well with you.' Denominations were born and continue to grow in numbers. It is estimated that there are between 30,000 and 40,000+ Christian denominations in the world today! So much for unity in the church!

Maybe your grouping focuses upon communion, a particular creed, following certain behaviours, spiritual gifts, or many, many other different things. 'Follow our way and you will be okay with God.'

This is perfectly understandable, as it goes right back to the temptation, to which Eve succumbed, in the Garden of Eden.

*4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)*

We still believe we can manipulate God through our human based religious actions.

Religion is based upon order, upon 'law', and this is the method kings use to control their subjects.

The kingdom of God however, works on an entirely different principle, one of 'relationship', the restoration of that which Adam and Eve had with their Maker as they walked with Him *in the garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8)*

As we see in these days when divorce is rampant, relationship is not easy, nor is it able to be programmed into a do this, don't do this, method that will work in all circumstances and conditions. If only married life was so easy!

Reality is, as man is different to woman, so too are humans different to God.

When we come into relationship with Jesus we have to learn His ways, the ways of the kingdom of God. While we have a textbook in the Bible, the application of the principles, of kingdom ways, can only be truly learned through the intimate guiding and teaching of the Holy Spirit and giving Him the authority to transform our life individually.

**Our relationship is not to be with, or through, a 'king, but directly with the 'King of Kings'.**

I was reading the Amplified Bible and realised that these verses of Jesus in Matthew hold the key to the kingdom.

*28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden and overburdened, and I will cause you to rest. (I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls.) 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart, and you will find rest (relief and ease and refreshment and recreation and blessed quiet) for your souls. 30 For my yoke is wholesome (useful, good - not harsh, hard sharp or pressing, but comfortable, gracious and pleasant) and my burden is light and easy to be borne. (Matthew 11:28-30)*

**The primary difference between king and kingdom understanding is in the timing of the inheritance of the kingdom.**

The standard teaching of 'kings' (the church, evangelists etc.) is centered on being 'born again' now in order to get to heaven when we die. The motivation and action required for the born again experience is beautifully described in verse 28. *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden and overburdened, and I will cause you to rest. (I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls.)*

For me, this experience came when I was at the lowest point of my life. While I had spent much of my life in a Baptist church, therefore knowing all the theory of being 'born again', it wasn't until I truly reached the 'end of my tether' that I was really ready and willing to truly come to Jesus. A successful businessman, operating the largest mail order company in New Zealand, I lost everything in the 1987 share market crash. After the worst 18 months of my life, fighting against being declared bankrupt, I finally, and inevitably, lost the battle. I was no longer able to support my family. My self-esteem was in tatters. I had to line up in the queue to sign up for 'the dole', the unemployment benefit, so that we could have some money to live on. In the Social Welfare Office that day in 1989, I placed my burden upon Jesus. He 'saved' me. I was 'born again'. I had my ticket to heaven!

In Baptist, and church circles generally, it was accepted that I should now live a good life while here on earth until the day I died and received my final inheritance, entry to heaven.

But my soul was heavy! Surely Lord, there has to be more!

I thought I had found it when I entered the realm of Holy Spirit anointing as experienced in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Yes, I did experience more of the reality of Jesus through the revelation and power of the Holy Spirit.

Yet my soul was still heavy! Surely Lord, there has to be more!

Over the years the Lord has gradually been revealing 'the more' to me. An understanding of verse 29. *Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart, and you will find rest (relief and ease and refreshment and recreation and blessed quiet) for your souls.* The reality of the yoke.

*YOKE: The reality of two being joined together, in 'a bond of union, esp. the marriage tie' (Oxford Dictionary).* I am to learn of and adopt His character in order to become as one with Him. For the inheritance of His kingdom is now.

We are to build His kingdom upon earth, as we (should!) always pray, *10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)* Yes, the kingdom of God is to be established upon the earth through His sold out people, those who are prepared to put aside everything to take on His yoke, to become as Jesus to the world.

This is not an event, such as being born again or receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but rather, a process that takes a lifetime to enter in to.

Some people ask, 'why were you running a second hand clothing business when your role is supposedly to be to build the end time church?' At the time we started, I too wondered if I was doing the right thing or being subtly distracted by the devil. For it is all too easy to embrace the 'kings' concept

that 'ministry' is both different to, and a superior calling, to 'working in the world'. For kings are put on pedestals, whereas in the kingdom we are to be *gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart*, as was Jesus.

What I, along with many others, are discovering, is that the reality of the kingdom is not found within the walls of a building or at a high powered conference or convention, but in the highways and byways of the world. It is found in being a reflection of Jesus to the people of your community - to your neighbours, to your workmates and friends, to the poor and to the needy. For this indeed, is the fertile ground in which the seeds of the kingdom will grow.

As we move away from disagreements over doctrine, building churches and running programmes, all in the realm of kings, and move individually into being lights to the world of our communities, following the example of Jesus by doing the will of the Father as communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, so we will truly discover; *30 For my yoke is wholesome (useful, good - not harsh, hard sharp or pressing, but comfortable, gracious and pleasant) and my burden is light and easy to be borne.*

Gone is the striving, gone is the competition to become the 'greatest king'. (leader, minister, pastor, teacher, evangelist, prophet or apostle.) For there is to be only one king, king Jesus! In Him our very being is to be centered.

His kingdom is based upon love. His great love for us overrides all. He forgives me when I go astray. And I do! He loves me when I am unlovely. And I am! But in our imperfection He accepts us, both you and me. And He calls upon us to love others in the way He loves us.



*And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.  
(1 John 4:21)*

**It is upon the foundation of love, not competition, that God's kingdom on earth is built.**

# JESUS AS A LEADER

What sort of a leader was Jesus?

The first comment has to be that Jesus was most unlike the leader the Jews (or we for that matter) expected.

The Old Testament prophets spoke about a Messiah who would rescue the people from their bondage. The Jews, who were continuously under occupation by the various super powers of the times, naturally thought that their rescuer would be a warrior king who would bring back the glory days the nation of Israel experienced during the time of Kings David and Solomon.

This is what the people were expecting on Palm Sunday and their disappointment and frustration rapidly turned into anger and rejection, so just a few days later, Jesus was hung on the cross to experience the dreadful death of a criminal or traitor, deserted by nearly everyone who had once followed Him. Of course, had we been there, we would never have done such a thing! Or would we?

I would suggest that the leadership style of Jesus was so different to what we, in our human condition understand, that we too would have misunderstood and sided with the people of Jerusalem on that dreadful but wonderful day.

You see, Jesus rejected a worldly form of leadership when He resisted satan's temptation right at the beginning of His ministry.

*8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"* (Matthew 4:8-10)

Yes, at this time Jesus stated that His leadership style would be different, one of servanthood and obedience, not to His own will or that of the people, but 100% to the will of His Father.

For Isaiah had prophesied, and the people ignored,

*"Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:1-3)*

From this description by Isaiah, we can assume that Jesus did not look like Jim Caviezel or any other 'Hollywood Jesus'.

In fact, other than Roman Historians Tacitus and Josephus who recorded the fact that Jesus had lived in Palestine, the secular world took virtually no notice of Him. Atheists have seized upon this paucity of information to try to prove that Jesus didn't even exist!

For Jesus was not a leader in the sense that the world knows and understands. Unlike King Saul, He was not outstandingly tall or handsome. He had a basic following of 12 (then 11) men who had been rejected by the

Rabbis of the day as intellectually inferior, not suitable to their requirements. His most loyal supporters were a small group of women, some of whom were related to Him. In fact, after the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, there were only 120 followers left. If the Holy Spirit had not come at Pentecost, no doubt the 120 would have quickly dwindled away too.

Jesus was a leader who lived amongst the people, sharing life with them, both its ups and downs. He was initially lauded and applauded by the common people but later in His ministry was cast aside by most of them too. Of course, He was never acceptable to the secular or spiritual leadership of the day. He experienced the sorrow and suffering of rejection and finally lost His life when both the rulers and people combined to get rid of Him.

Not a leader we would admire, or follow.

Jesus did not have a 'ministry' of His own!

What a ridiculous statement, David! But it's true! Jesus came into the world not to make a name for Himself by promoting God, but simply to do His Father's will, 100% of the time - to do absolutely whatever His Father asked.

*5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, O God.'"* (Hebrews 10:5-7)

His role, and that of His followers, was to promote the kingdom of God. When he sent out the 72 He instructed them:

8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' (Luke 10:8-9)

Jesus did not promote Himself, or His ministry. This was always God's plan, even being prophesied through Isaiah.

#### *GOD'S CHOSEN SERVANT*

15 Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, 16 warning them not to tell who he was. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 18 "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. **19 He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.** 20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. 21 In his name the nations will put their hope." (Matthew 12:15-21)

His major display of divinity, the transfiguration, was reserved for His 3 closest disciples, as an encouragement for the difficult days ahead.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (Matthew 17:1-2)

And came with a 'pre-death publicity ban'.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." (Matthew 17:9)

His mode of transport was the same as that of the people - walking. On His 'special day', 'Palm Sunday', He rode a donkey. What we need to understand is, no leader of the time would have been seen dead riding a donkey! It was the mode of transport of the poorest people only. Much like the Queen of England travelling to her coronation, not in a gilded coach, but on a bicycle or on a public bus!

He 100% served His Father, even when He knew it would bring unimaginable pain and suffering, resulting in death. He didn't want to die this way, but was prepared to put aside His desires for His Fathers will.

*39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*  
(Matthew 26:39)

He did not glorify Himself nor allow the people to glorify Him. Instead, that was done by the Father Himself.

*8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)*

As part of the transformation from kings to kingdom we are to be the same as Jesus:

*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in*

*spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:1-7)*

This leadership style is not easy for us to comprehend and even more difficult to put into practice! I will now share some personal testimony of the struggles I have had, and continue to face, in this area.

# LIVING LIKE JESUS

A little background to place things in perspective, warts and all!

Before we start you should know that, in the natural, I was highly motivated, ambitious, self-confident and successful in most things I put my hand to.

God had to break me of this! He did! I became a bankrupt, not once but twice. In the first bankruptcy I found Jesus, while in the second, I got more deeply into Him.

About 3 years after becoming a Christian I was literally working in the fields amongst my flower crops (sounds romantic but actually a lot of hard work!) when Jesus spoke with me and asked me to start this ministry. He gave me the name, not 'David Tait Ministries' as would have been my natural inclination, following in the footsteps of many other eminent leaders, but rather, 'Walking With Jesus Ministries'. You see, He knew far more about what He wanted to teach me than I did!

WWJ, as a para-church ministry, reaching out to all, rather than being ensconced in a particular denomination, which has the 'advantage' of being 'kept humble' by the leaders of churches and denominations who don't understand what such organisations are called to do! This experience is shared by many others in similar ministries.

At first, the ministry was very successful. The 'Walking With Jesus' discipleship course was written by the Holy Spirit, with an ignorant, new



Christian me, simply holding the pen! See [www.wwj.org.nz/wwjc.php](http://www.wwj.org.nz/wwjc.php)  
Around 10,000 people did the course which was amazing in a small country like New Zealand, with an even smaller Christian population.

No, I didn't become famous! But I had success beyond my 'Christian age'. At the completion of writing the course, I conducted some evangelistic meetings, the last of which in particular, the Holy Spirit attended very powerfully. It was a realm way outside of my experience. Added to that was extreme criticism from leadership, killing public ministry for 5 years. From up to down in an instant - even to the extent of thinking about taking my life. All topped off with my second bankruptcy towards the end of this time. How the mighty had fallen!

Through this difficult time, the Lord was teaching me to rely more upon Him. I had to learn (and am still learning) that He is everything and I am nothing! To many readers, maybe even to you, this will sound wrong. For surely, the Lord builds us up! That is what we are taught in so many programs and doctrines. But I am sorry, these teachings are just worldly 'life success' principles applied to the church situation.

We are actually called to do the opposite to what the world teaches!

Throughout this time I had to learn the lessons of my experiences by getting deeper into Jesus, in order to start developing His attributes and attitudes, which are just so different to those of the world.

It is easy to acknowledge servant-hood, obedience and humility in theory, but oh so difficult to truly put them into practice! For I, too often, have the same experience as Paul:

*So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:25b)*

Women are 'relational', men, 'task' orientated. Women understand the 'intangible' while men desire the 'tangible'. Women relate more easily to God than men. A simple reason why churches worldwide are two-thirds women.

When the Lord asked me to start Walking With Jesus Ministries, to build His end time church, my natural thought patterns as a man, were that it would encompass something in the natural as well as the spiritual.

However, over the years of my wilderness training of the Lord, He changed my whole way of thinking. He showed me, often kicking and screaming in my male motivation thought patterns, that the coming 'kingdom age', is to be different to 'church age' it is superseding.

There is something in us men that likes building empires, yearns for titles and position, and desires formal programs where we can be seen to be doing, in a logical way, what God has called us to do. Thus we build church buildings, allocate ourselves titles, and work out the most effective way to 'win the lost'. All of which follow the pattern of the Old Testament, but none of which are found in the New!

We men have very much the same attitude as the Pharisees, operating under Old Testament understanding and male motivation, who were also looking for a physical kingdom.

*20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful*

*observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)*

As I came out of my wilderness period, I received invitations to travel to Africa and Asia. Here came a real test for me.

For, as I travelled, I was expected to act in the way of the traditional understanding of the people I visited. In Africa particularly, life is larger than life! A continent of extremes - extremely wonderful and colourful and extremely bad and sad.

Here was this ordinary man from New Zealand who didn't dress up in a suit and tie, who only wanted to be known as David, not wanting to encourage people to join his 'organisation' that would undoubtedly bring the world to Christ, or more extreme, to be the only group that would get to heaven.

What a surprise for them and a test for me! It was very tempting to join the accepted system! My 'best' introduction was the 'Rev. Dr. Bishop David Tait, JPG'. I could not work out what qualification 'JPG' was. Eventually, inspiration came! I had forwarded my photo in a jpeg file format, davidtait.jpg!

I was offered bishops robes to wear.

I was constantly besieged by people wanting to join my organisation, to form a new denomination. I was offered the title of a church building worth \$US1,000,000.

To my natural man, all these things were hugely desirable. Particularly after having come through a time of wilderness! 'You can show all those who

criticised you, who was right (revenge). You can build your own headquarters (for I have never wanted a church!), you can be spiritual father to all these people (power and control),' tempted satan.

Finally, I remembered the temptation of Jesus!

I remembered my role. Not to build 'my kingdom' but 'God's kingdom'.

The defining difference between the two kingdoms is, 'Who is boss?'

Every church leader will say that God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, is his boss. But instead, we mostly build earthly kingdoms founded on the best of intentions, often run by very godly people. A hierarchy develops and we end up spending more time in administration than in seeking the will of God. This is the reality of the church age.

I understand that you may well feel I am being idealistic, but the message of the kingdom is that God desires to personally guide all those who have come into his kingdom through the sacrifice of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, to do His will upon the earth.

We are even asked to pray for it, all the time!

*10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)*

As the years pass, there is arising a greater dissatisfaction with the status quo within the church system from those who are seeking a deeper relationship with Jesus.

The bride is starting to arise! A new generation prepared to fully submit their lives to the will of the Father, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in preparation for the return of Jesus.

Come Jesus, come.

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:7-9)*

# SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The role of kingdom leaders is to encourage believers to personally seek and follow God's will for their own lives, rather than follow the vision, or join the church or organisation of a human leader, no matter how godly that person may be.

Last week, we saw that a fundamental difference between church and kingdom eras is centered round whom we are to follow.

In the church, people are expected to follow and help implement the vision of the pastor or leader of the church. In the kingdom, the will of the Father for the individual.

The hardest, often most thankless, job in God, is that of leadership. To overcome the difficulties, leaders have effectively gone back to the Old Testament concept of a (although often poorly) paid priesthood, trained (with a theological qualification) to again become intermediaries between parishioners and God. I fully understand this and have a great sympathy for those in this position.

However, in kingdom understanding, we are brought back to God through Jesus and guided by the will of the Father, as expressed to us through the Holy Spirit. The role of the pastor therefore, changes to one of encouraging and helping others fulfill the visions given to the individuals rather than recruiting people to his or her vision.

This role of leadership is described as;

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **12 to prepare God's people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

In church culture, it is accepted that the highest calling is to be a fulltime minister of the Gospel. This has led to a 'we' and 'they' division in the church. This is often encouraged by the laity, the 'theys', as they see it is a convenient way to pass over their responsibility to the 'spiritual professionals'. It is therefore natural for this superior/inferior mindset to develop.

Once again, this is not Biblical. For the Bible emphasises servant leadership. Sadly, I have seen so many start out with the calling of servant leadership, but almost inevitably it seems, we fall back into the worldly patterns of human leadership.

However, servant leadership - of going down rather than up - is the leaders call.

*4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. (2 Corinthians 13:4)*

*10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10)*

*2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy*

*for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)*

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus changed the balance of power in the church away from the paid priesthood of the Old Testament to the priesthood of all believers working together, in the New.

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:6)*

Personally, I know how hard it is to resist the spiritual hierarchy. If you want to have influence in the church you need to follow the system of the particular grouping you belong to. I have had much soul searching and heartache balancing the Word on one hand and the system on the other. Of course I want to be effective. Of course I want to be accepted. But more than all, I want to follow the Word and revelation of the Lord.

I have been truly blessed to share the principles of the Lord in many different situations, from Lutheran Seminary to Anglican Nunnery, to Pentecostal Bible Schools, to poor villages in Africa and Asia where the people are illiterate and struggling too much to survive to be worried about theology.

I have seen the Holy Spirit move and minister to the people in all these situations. More than once I have had Doctors of Theology and Bible teachers, at first very skeptical, come up and say that although they have had years of theological training, for the first time they truly understood the principles of God, the reality of what Jesus has done, newly grounded in them by the Holy Spirit - not me. Doctor or peasant, Jesus reaches out to each one of us personally.



There is no educational or positional hierarchy in Jesus. In His kingdom, both on earth and in heaven, whether prince or pauper, we will simply be rewarded for our obedience to the will of the Father for our lives.

# **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HIS CHURCH**

When we have a child, we show our love not through allowing him or her to do and have anything they might desire, for our role is to teach them how to cope with the life situations they will face in the future. Some parents understand this better than others. So our love is to be expressed both positively in affirmation and through discipline.

I love God. God loves me. As part of this love relationship, God points out to me various aspects of my life and behaviour that are wrong, that do not honour Him. He calls upon me to 'repent', seek forgiveness for, and permanently turn from my ungodly ways to His way.

I love the church (yes I do!). God loves the church. As part of this love relationship God reveals various aspects of church life and behaviour that are wrong, that do not honour Him. He calls upon the church to 'repent', to seek forgiveness for, and permanently turn from its ungodly ways to His ways.

Yes, Jesus loves me, loves you, as we are, with unconditional love. Sin repented of is both forgiven and forgotten by God. But He still desires us individually and as a body to be transformed into His image, the image of Jesus. To become the pure spotless bride for which Jesus is to return.

This involves a change in the church from a 'kings' to a 'kingdom' mindset.

The focus of a king is upon himself. The focus of the church today is upon itself. The best way to illustrate what our true heart is, is what we do with our wallet! Let us see what we do as a church.

*Globally, one-tenth of one percent (ten cents per hundred dollars) of all Christian income went to global foreign missions, estimates David Barrett in his annual "Status of Global Mission" report for 2005.*

*Seven-tenths of 1% went to churches and another 1.2% went to parachurch organizations globally. Fundamentally the issue is stinginess among Christians (at least nominal ones)—churches being composed of Christians—and even more fundamentally, the issue is failing to avail ourselves of the grace of God.*

*As Barrett put it, "Though Christians number only 33% of the world population, they receive 53% of the entire world's annual income—and spend 98% of it on themselves."*

Ninety-eight percent of church income is spent on the people of the particular church to which it is given. Two percent is given to missions and helping the poor, the supposed focus of the church.

While you may argue about the detail of the figures, it is obvious that our church is focused upon itself, the characteristic of kings. Spiritually we preach unconditional love, prosperity, good health, an easy life upon earth. All based around self.

In the kingdom age however, our emphasis changes from satisfaction of self to the unconditional love of God and others. This means that our money and efforts will be spent on helping others, particularly the poor and in taking the gospel of our lives as well as our tongue, to all non-believers. The spiritual

keys to this change are repentance, holiness and righteousness, all items avoided, or at best given lip service, in the church of kings today.

There is only one place for this to start and that is with **REPENTANCE**. The call of God today to me, to you, and to the church is to repent of our selfish ways! Genuine repentance requires change. A change of heart! A change of actions! Including a change in both the amount and the way we spend the money the Lord has entrusted us with!

This applies to me too, as well as you, and the church as a whole.

Several months ago we had a minister friend visit and he, very intelligently, although scarily for me, asked Kathy what she thought the main focus of the ministry entrusted to me was. Now Kathy has heard me speak often, and naturally is my greatest critic for she knows me best. Her answer surprised me - which she can still do sometimes, even after 38 years of marriage! I thought her reply would be something about pointing the way ahead for the church. She said to our friend Rodney, 'it is a ministry of repentance.'

I had to think about that! She was exactly right - as she is wont to be in many matters. For **repentance is the key to the kingdom**. Without repentance, both body and corporate, we, the church, will not be transformed into the bride Jesus desires us to be.

Thank you Doll, for your insight.

It follows the themes of, not only the ministry of John the Baptist;

*In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." 3 This is he who was spoken*

*of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" (Matthew 3:1-3)*

but also of Jesus.

*17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. (Matthew 4:17)*

### **Repentance is the compulsory foundational step in inheriting the kingdom.**

This testimony is difficult for me to write. You will likely think that I am stupid, mad, weird, or perhaps, ridiculously super-spiritual! For I want to talk about the role of money in my life and my change, over time, from a 'kings' to a 'kingdom' attitude towards it.

I am a businessman both by nature and nurture. I was brought up in a family where my father was successful businesswise and I obtained a commerce and administration degree at university.

I was very successful, firstly in the corporate world, becoming the Marketing Manager for one of New Zealand's largest, and very conservative, insurance companies, at around age 30.

Having always had a hankering to work for myself however, I left this job to set up businesses on my own account. By 40 I was, on paper, a millionaire. A great example of the success of the prosperity doctrine - except I wasn't a Christian!

In the 1987 share market crash I lost everything. I gave my heart to Jesus as I stood in the queue waiting to register for the dole, the unemployment benefit that we are fortunate to have in our social welfare state of New Zealand. I had come to the end of my tether.

My values changed - at least partially. Now I knew that money wasn't everything. The sun still comes up in the morning, even when you have none!

The Lord was gracious to me and I built up another successful business. We double tithed. We also gifted a lot of money to the church. We distributed a discipleship course free of charge on a large scale. Classic prosperity doctrine stuff this time! We gave lots of OUR money to God! Did lots of good.

One day, the Lord told me He would bring along a buyer for our business within 1 month and then I was to go into fulltime ministry. On the last day of the month, the buyer came. I did the logical 'king thing' and invested OUR money in a property development designed to provide us with an income so that we wouldn't be a burden on others in ministry.

The Lord however had other ideas! Costs went up, prices came down and once again, I was declared bankrupt! Oh dear, not the way it is meant to happen according to the prosperity preachers.

Through this experience however, I learned the 'kingdom way' in regards to money. I came to understand the meaning of that difficult to explain line in the Lord's Prayer;

*11 Give us today our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)*

For then, and now, we became dependent upon Him for our daily provision. We own nothing but our household furniture. I haven't personally earned any income for more than 15 years. We have lived on Kathy's salary as a Theatre Nurse at our local hospital. She is amazing, for women do like security.

Last time I went to Africa, the Lord provided the fare, but no spending money. I went through Africa literally on 50 cents a day. I took away \$30 for 2 months. After a week I was down to \$2 before the Lord started providing. It was not easy. Particularly for one used to making money through my own efforts.

But what I have now learned is that everything I have is His. It is all HIS money, not mine. Even though we now had nothing and couldn't support all the good causes we previously had, we were walking more deeply in faith and in God's will. Under my previous 'kingly' understanding and life I would have been welcomed with open arms into any church in the world for we gave liberally with no conditions attached. Now however, as we endeavour to live a 'kingdom' lifestyle, financially, we can't. The value in this is hard to understand in a kingly world but it is kingdom understanding.

The harsh reality and fallacy of the prosperity doctrine is that some people have the ability to make money while others don't, irrespective of whether we are a Christian or not. This ability is inborn rather than learned. In our clothing operation we have an 11 year old volunteer, who can't spell, cannot get on with people because of an inherited condition, yet who is an amazing trader, one who will make money when he grows up, despite all his handicaps.

It is true though, if we apply sound Biblical principles to our life, we should be better off than the average, as we will develop different priorities to those we had when in the world. However, the poor will never magically get rich through 'giving to get', the principle of 'kings'.

God is calling us to the understanding of the 'kingdom', that EVERYTHING WE HAVE BELONGS TO HIM, to spend His (not our) money, not on ourselves but primarily for the extension of the kingdom.

I am not saying that you must choose the financial path Kathy and I have taken. But, particularly for those of us who live in the affluent West, we need to take heed of the warning contained in the Parable of the Rich Ruler. I will leave you with the words of Jesus:

*So then, any of you who does not forsake (renounce, surrender claim to, give up, say goodbye to) all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33 Amplified Version)*



# STEWARDSHIP

Over the years God has worked to drive the self out of me. My personal success and pride of achievement has been somewhat dented by two bankruptcies! Some of us - actually, nearly all of us - are slow learners! It takes much time for us to change, particularly our ingrained attitudes.

Outward sin can often be relatively easily repented of when we truly come to Jesus. We can appear to be living a new life - and we are. That is tremendous in His sight and a testimony to others of God's goodness and His power to change us. This is as the Scripture says;

*18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)*

Or is it?

It is not!

The Scripture says, *with ever-increasing glory* or as the King James puts it, *from glory to glory*.

Yes, as I continue to discover and experience, for me (and you) that in order to grow from glory to glory, our ingrained attitudes need to be 'expunged' (a beautiful, descriptive word, even sounding like what it means; *1 : to strike out, obliterate, or mark for deletion 2 : to efface completely : destroy 3 : to eliminate (as a memory) from one's consciousness*) from my (your) life.

For me, my first bankruptcy brought me to Jesus and I dealt with many of my **OUTWARD SINS**. eg. lying, theft, pornography, etc., etc. However it has taken the second bankruptcy to start dealing with the **INWARD SIN** in my life. eg. selfishness, pride in achievement, etc., etc. Ask Kathy for more! These things can be hidden from those who know us only superficially eg, even in ministry, and also, to some extent, but much less, to those who know us better such as spouse, family and close friends.

Today I want to illustrate this through the place of money in my life. Even where we think it doesn't, the reality is, money (or property or possessions) plays a hugely important part in all our lives. 24% of the parables of Jesus are directly about money, for He was a very practical teacher, and 80% of them incorporate it indirectly, in one way or another.

As mentioned earlier, I came into relationship with Jesus through bankruptcy, from a lack of money to feed my family, while waiting in the queue to register for the unemployment benefit.

When the Lord re-established us in a successful business, we double tithed, gave away heaps, and paid out lots of money for 6000 copies of the discipleship course, 'Walking With Jesus', to be printed, recorded and distributed. As an aside, just this Friday, a lady came into our shop, saw a copy of the course, and told 'the other Kathy' on the counter that 12 years ago she had written away for it, having seen it advertised in our garden product mail order catalogue, and had become a Christian through it! Praise the Lord!

I just want you to see that while my attitude to money had changed for the better, and Kathy and I were generous with it, I was still working in the

domain of kings, using MY money for God's work. The ultimate example of this was when, being called into full time ministry, I attempted to use MY money to build a property portfolio to finance the ministry, so we wouldn't be dependent upon others. A kingly attitude.

I still had much to learn!

For God needed to teach me to be truly dependent upon Him, not myself, for my provision.

So came a second bankruptcy and we started the 'adventure' of the past 7 or so years where we have had a new and different lifestyle and my attitude towards money has completely changed to more of a kingdom orientation, where my money has become GOD'S money.

For the past 14 years or more we have lived on the wages from my wife Kathy's 4 day a week job as a theatre nurse at our local public hospital.

For nearly 7 of these years I worked (hard!) in Walking With Jesus Ministries, producing the teachings the Lord gave me, primarily on the end time church, and available for free download on our website, as well as visiting and ministering through Africa and Asia, as the Lord provided.

Then running a chain of Charity shops for no salary. Which have now been sold, and mainly back to ministry.

We simplified our lives, of necessity, living on less than a third of the income we could normally have expected to receive had we both been working fulltime. After losing our home in my bankruptcy, we now live in a rented

unit or flat, and personally own only our household furniture. We gave away all the money we had left and now literally live from day to day, or fortnight to fortnight, as that is when Kathy is paid.

We therefore do understand the reality of the Lord's Prayer where it says,

*Give us today our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)*

I will be honest! This has not always been easy! For our family and friends cannot understand it. Many see Kathy as simply working to keep me! They will say this to Kathy more than me, for those who do know us well do know my energy levels and work ethic, and realise I have not been lying in bed with my feet up watching daytime TV! In the West though, our status in society is largely judged by income and possessions. So these reactions are understandable, particularly because of the degree of change they see in us, from running successful businesses to living on a single, part time wage.

Continuing with the honest streak, it also hasn't always been easy not having the money to do the things we used to do without thinking! The call into full time ministry has come at a cost. At times, waiting for the next pay, or simply knowing we can't do some things that our friends can do, has been frustrating. Kathy is not motivated by money in a general sense, but we all need it to do the things we desire to do. Our only 3 grandchildren live in Aberdeen, Scotland, as far away from New Zealand as it is possible to get. So, as neither of us has the faith to walk on water for 20,000km, (which would take a long time!) to see them Kathy has to go on a plane, which costs! As I wrote this Kathy was actually in Scotland, for over time, we managed to save the fare. Our kids have been great about it too, with no apparent resentment at the lack of a financial inheritance.

This is not a 'pity party', nor a thinly veiled call for financial support, but simply a statement of a little of the reality of our lives. However, we have also learned that money isn't everything, that the Lord provides our needs but not necessarily our wants, and that our prime purpose in life is to help others, whether through WWJ or in Kathy baking muffins for those going through hard times. Like it or not, there is a cost to inheriting the kingdom.

Under kingly thinking, living a kingly lifestyle, we give God perhaps our tithe plus maybe gifts of some of what we own. To fully inherit the kingdom however, we must come to the understanding (in practical reality and living, not just in theory) that everything we have is Gods, provided to us for His use and purposes.

We have simply been obedient to what God called us too in ministry, His ministry, not our own. When I was disobedient by trying to provide for ourselves in a kingly fashion through my own efforts, I ended up bankrupt! A hard way to learn a lesson, but a good point at which to start off a new way of life, as we had little left to give away anyway!

Please, I am not saying that God is calling you to the same walk as we have and that you need to sell up and give away everything. He may, or may not, be calling you to this.

What I am saying though, is that every one of us needs to genuinely commit to give everything that God has entrusted to us back to Him. Then be open, with 100% obedience, to do whatever He tells us to do with what is now His property, His bank accounts, His possessions. For the kingdom is His and His alone.

Over the past weeks, before writing, I have experienced bad spiritual attacks, which to me is normally I sign that I am doing the right thing! However this week, I am writing with a freedom and joy in my heart that I have not experienced for some time. It is as if a barrier has been broken through. I pray that you might have a similar experience of joy and relaxation in your discipleship destiny when you give over everything to Him.

No, it is not easy, for it goes against every grain of our human nature. That is why I have shared as honestly as I can. Jesus was called to the Cross, a place He did not, in His humanness, want to go.

*39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*  
(Matthew 26:39)

Yet He went through with it in obedience to the Father's will and was raised up to the highest place!

*8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)*

If we too, make the sacrifice that we are being called to by the Father, we also will rule and reign with Jesus!

*9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God*

*from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”*  
(Revelation 5:9-10)

The prize is worth it!

# **TRIP TO AFRICA AND ITS AFTERMARTH**

A huge test of my willingness to trust God to provide came in late 2006 when I embarked on another trip to Africa.

I had to pay for the tickets 1 month before departure and, as I have come to expect, the Lord provided the money to pay for them.

Now, my prayer changed from provision for the tickets to provision for spending money, not for myself, but so that I could help the people I was to visit. Three weeks passed - no money. Four weeks - no money. Surely someone will help at the airport - for you always hear of that happening to others. Napier airport - nothing. Auckland airport - nothing.

We had a little money left until Kathy's next pay. So I drew out \$US30 from our personal account, leaving the balance for Kathy to live on. 'Well Lord, I have 50c a day to spend. This is new territory for me!'

I arrived in South Africa. I needed to buy a bus fare to Stanger, where I was to minister. \$12 gone! Over the next few days I put more into the collection plates than I received (ie nothing!) until I had but \$2 left. I didn't have enough faith to give that away too! And I still had to buy a bus ticket back to Pretoria. Maybe I would be stuck in Stanger forever!

Then the Lord started providing! We went to churches with an open heart for the teaching - and deeper pockets! The situation was relieved!



In summary I left Africa after 2 months with no money in my pocket, but having travelled through 4 countries, 2 of which were very poor. No, I wasn't able to bless the people financially, but imparted both the Word and the Spirit to those who weren't simply looking for a handout from the white man.

I really was then able to understand how the seventy-two must have felt when Jesus sent them out to spread the Gospel message.

While I was away I was introduced to the concept of sending second hand clothing to Africa. I would need a book to tell the full story of how! God works in amazing, and sometimes strange, ways!

Coming back to New Zealand, in February 2007 we started, without a cent of capital, to collect clothing. In 18 months we built up an organisation processing 3 tonnes of clothing a week allowing us to support development projects in Africa.

This project is being operated, to the best of our ability, in kingdom fashion. I still work for nothing. We continue to live on my wife Kathy's income. We have a mixture of paid staff, partially paid staff and volunteers. The Lord has blessed it tremendously as there is no way it could be where it now is without His help and blessing.

The basis of our doing business has changed from the 'kingly' approach of our former mail order business (which the Lord blessed) where the profits were ours although we gave away a lot for the Lord's work.

Under the 'kingdom' approach we now adopt, the business and all moneys earned are His. Instead of operating as a private company, of which Kathy and I were the shareholders, the owners, we now operate as a charitable trust, purely and simply on His behalf. Nothing belongs to us - everything belongs to the Lord.

Upon returning from Africa, I asked the Lord why He should want me to change tack and set up a recycled clothing business. For I had spent 9 years, at His leading, seeking His Word and sharing it with you, and others, as He led and provided. I worked hard, as I have always done, but obviously in a different way to that of running a business.

Several months before travelling, He had started to prepare me for a change by indicating that He had now given me the basic teaching He wanted me to share, and my focus was to change from receiving to getting it out. I had no knowledge of how that was to happen.

Under the 'kingly' church system, the highest calling is seen as being in fulltime pastoral, preaching and teaching ministry. Ministers are placed on a pedestal by the people - and all too rapidly pulled down when their human failings are exposed.

Effectively, a new priesthood has been created. No matter how humble the leader, it is almost impossible to avoid being affected by this, for it is encouraged by both leadership and people alike.

I am saying this from the foundations of experience in travelling the world and seeing its reality in many countries and different church situations, as

well as from being a non-denominationally aligned ministry, accepted by some and rejected by others.

However Jesus came and died to eliminate the professional Aaronic priesthood of that time and establish a new, universal priesthood of all believers, to take its place.

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6)*

When I sought the Lord over this, He showed me two things.

Firstly, while it is an honour to share the Word, we are also required to 'walk the talk', as the saying goes. For the call upon all our lives is to become the 'living word'. This is a 'kingdom' principle. James was particularly strong on this.

*14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:14-17)*

Preaching, teaching, evangelizing, prophesying, is of limited value, if we do not 'practice what we preach', to quote another saying from James.

*26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:26)*

## **PART 4**

# **THE KINGDOM CHURCH**

# WHAT IS CHURCH?

I started out in full time ministry around 20 years ago now. (Dates have never been one of my strong points!) Having heard clearly from the Lord that this was what He wanted me to do, then having it confirmed in a precisely practical way He had promised, I was full of faith that the Lord would provide financially for us.

A friend of mine says that if the Lord doesn't provide financially, you are walking in 'hope' rather than 'faith'! While I don't totally agree, I have seen lots of people step out into ministry, not through a genuine call from God, but as a means to obtain an income, or because they don't know what else to do. Certainly not solid foundations!

I did not know how God would provide, but was confident He would. Perhaps through donations from the website or the ezines I write? Or, just maybe, from a benefactor - likely American! Or maybe from sales of the book 'Eagles Fly High!' that I spent a year writing.

Nothing happened! Received a few donations, but not many, no benefactor, and had to self-publish the book on a photocopier as no publisher was interested!

The Lord even had us give away what remaining cash 'nest egg' we had! No assets left other than our household furniture!

But God works in ways very different to ours. My fully supportive (most of the time!) wife Kathy, was working 4 days a week as a theatre nurse at our

local hospital. We changed our lifestyle to live simply and relatively frugally, in New Zealand terms, off her income, which we still do today. No ministry corporate jet! Or flash offices! Actually, operated out of a bedroom in our rented house!

"Why Lord? Why! Surely we should be provided for by the thousands of people we are ministering to! But we will remain faithful to your call."

It is only recently that I have come to understand why God has worked in this way. For my thinking was that of 'kings'. A successful ministry is judged by its size, its wealth, its popularity. For that is how kings, both in the natural and spiritual worlds think. The big American TV ministries, for example, are considered more blessed by God than the pastor in the struggling small church down the road.

However, as the Lord has shown me more recently, this way of thinking is not that of the 'kingdom'.

For the financial support of those you are ministering to comes at a cost - the cost of compromise. Wow! What a terrible revelation to have!

Now I, and I hope you too, can start to understand why the church is in its 'wishy washy' predicament of today. Where compromise with the world has become the norm. For our spiritual leaders cannot tell the whole truth any more for fear of biting off the hands that feed them. If the Biblical truths of repentance and discipleship, of righteousness and holy living were to be forcefully preached, congregations, followers, supporters, would look for another church, another ministry, where they feel more comfortable and less spiritually challenged to change their lives.

Please don't get me wrong, to you reading this. I am not saying that you, that we, all have the wrong motives in our ministry. Consciously, not too many set out to deceive 'their flock' for financial security and gain. But we all need to live, to eat, to pay the rent, the mortgage, the expenses of daily life. Subconsciously therefore, the fear of losing our supporters, does have an effect upon what we say and how we act.

Not being financially reliant upon those we minister to, we can share the Word without fear or favour.

The Word of REPENTANCE. The Word of HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. The Word of COMMITMENT. The Word of DISCIPLESHIP. The Word of SACRIFICE. The words of the KINGDOM rather than the words of KINGS.

For the KINGDOM is fully centered round God and His desires, while KINGS have to place the needs and desires of their followers first in order to keep them, and retain their position of kingship.

So it is understandable then, why very many churches are loath to co-operate one with another, for leadership desire to protect their membership base is a priority above all else. It takes a truly enlightened, kingdom oriented leader, to put this protectionism to one side in order to work for the overall extension of the kingdom, even if it does cost money or involves loss of membership.

It has been proven time and time again that the most effective way of evangelising is to set up new groups, new 'churches'. For new, smaller groups, have enthusiasm, and the desire and ability to reach out into their

communities. Yet so few churches are prepared to make the sacrifice of losing their 'best and brightest', their most enthusiastic members, in order to set up a new work.

As for me, I can share these thoughts with you - which you can accept or reject - without having to worry where my next meal is coming from.

You see, we have a concept of 'church' that is at variance with what is seen in the New Testament. We see 'church' as a gathering of people led by a pastor, minister or priest, ideally with our own building, carrying out programmes based either within or emanating from, our building.

When we think of a church along the lines of being, 'Pastor Fred's church that meets in the church building on High Street.' This is kingly thinking, based upon the kingship of Fred with his territory being the church building and his 'subjects' being the church membership.

However this is not God's way.



# THE RELATIONAL CHURCH

For God's New Testament church is simply RELATIONAL. Relational in 3 ways.

## **1. RELATIONAL WITH GOD**

With God Himself. God is not found in pastor, building or programmes.

Jesus came as the final fulfillment, the replacement of the failed Aaronic priesthood. His sacrificial death upon the cross made Him the final mediator, intercessor, intermediary between you and me and God.

There are to be no more priests. No more kings. Only King Jesus! Our relationship is with the Father Himself, through and only through, Jesus. Thank you Lord!

Nor is God found in a building.

Pastor Fred does not have a church. Only God is to have HIS church.

Yet we too, like the people then, so often desire to return to the old ways of priesthood and buildings, ignoring the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Programmes are the result of a kingly based system's need to be seen to be doing something, in order to justify a the king's and the organisation's existence. Programmes generally formalise and replace

personal relationships. We are instructed to look after the widows and orphans and to feed the poor, to assist the less advantaged among us. While food banks are good, the most effective way of showing our love is still on a personal level.

## **2. RELATIONAL WITH FELLOW BELIEVERS**

The second relationship we are to have is with fellow believers.

This is something I have struggled with over the years. For I am not naturally a hugely relational person! Along with most men, I am task rather than people oriented. It is reality that women fit more easily into Christian ways, as 'relationship', both with God and people, comes more naturally to ladies. Two thirds of the church world-wide, consists of women! The proof is in the jaw movements! Men use about 15000 words per day, while women manage 30000!

Personally, I would rather listen than speak in a general conversation with another. A quiet type - most of the time!

A major key to developing discipleship in both our own lives and in others is sharing experiences. Or 'testimony', as we call it in the church.

As we mentioned last week, small, new, 'churches' are more effective in evangelism than their larger, established counterparts. A large part of this is due to the development of closer relationships between the members of the group. Being small and new they need to relate more closely in order to develop the group. Once a group, a church,

matures, the patterns, traditions and ways of doing things develop and formalize, which reduces the need for close interpersonal relationships.

It reaches the point where we go to church on Sundays, praise God, which is great, hear a sermon about the 'right way' to do things, be nice to the people we meet ('everything is wonderful') and go home depressed, to face the reality of our own, less than perfect lives, not realizing that other congregants are facing the same challenges we are. While we may have a 'testimony time' in the Sunday service, the testimonies are always positive stories with good outcomes, of difficulties overcome, which is also excellent, but may or may not help us in the difficulties we are facing that day. Testimonies easily become surreal rather than real, for none of us want to be seen in a bad light when we testify. Been there, done that!

Our church services are very much organised on a 'receiving' rather than a 'sharing', relational, basis. This becomes more pronounced, for practical reasons, the larger the congregation gets.

Churches endeavour to overcome this through the institution of small groups, of whatever name. These can help people relating more closely, one to another. However, if the groups become structured 'mini churches' where the majority of the input proceeds from the leader downwards, there is little difference to a 'Sunday situation'. This remains a major problem in the House Church Movement, where a house has simply been substituted for church building, but the downward 'preaching' principle continues unchanged, negating the worthy objectives the Movement is trying to achieve.

In recent years too, here in New Zealand, I have noticed an increasing tendency for church home groups to become more controlled by the hierarchy, their purpose becoming more to reinforce what the speaker said last Sunday rather than necessarily dealing with the positives and challenges of the reality the attendees are facing in their daily lives.

Of course, it is easier to see the problem than to find a practical solution! Particularly for men! Women are more likely to get together over a coffee and discuss their lives.

I would like to share with you the approach of the international men's organisation, 'Promise Keepers', regarding this. For you may find something in this you can apply to your personal life and that of your church.

### ***BANDS OF BROTHERS***

#### ***Reaching the Goal Together***

*At Promise Keepers we constantly talk about Men's Small Groups – "Bands of Brothers" - building relationships that hold fast through thick and thin so that we are not isolated and alone. A lone soldier cannot win a war. Others can encourage and challenge us to build our life on integrity, righteousness and holiness. These are the characteristics of God.*

*Promise Keepers promotes '4-Wheel Drive' groups. These are ideally 4-5 men, meeting weekly in a closed group (not open to visitors), building relationships and accountability. This is the Rolls Royce gold-plated version. It may not be suitable or attainable to everyone. So what are the other options?*

*Open groups - These are usually church-based and larger, meeting on a weekly basis. A committed core group is always there and others come and go.*

*Casual meetings - Lunch or coffee with one other guy once a month or so may be a starting point, or a maintenance option. Three men works okay, but the dynamic is different from a larger group. If one guy can't make a meeting, the dynamics are different again.*

*Our life as Christians means that we should be growing more Christlike – more like Christ. That growth reflects Christ's glory to others. It is a relationship built on love, not rules. Love comes from knowing Him. As men, we can find building our relationship with God difficult as the day-to-day problems of living and issues with other people demand our attention. Sometimes life just isn't working out the way we expected or hoped. So how can real change happen? It can take men to reach men. Men who take time to care enough to help each other in a common goal of growing more like Christ.*

*In today's busy climate, face-to-face meetings can be supplemented with other communication like phone calls, email, texting and messaging.*

*Because of the importance of standing strong together in the spiritual battle for souls, Promise Keepers is committed to supporting groups by publishing study books for small groups and providing other resources and information here on this site: [www.promisekeepers.org.nz](http://www.promisekeepers.org.nz)*

*Decide to get involved, if you are not already, and to make it work. Be a friend to others and look for ways to meet some of their needs - not just your own needs. Together we can achieve more than we can alone!*

We need to be encouraging one another, through honest sharing of both the successes and the challenges we face in our lives. For relationship and agape love are intertwined.

*23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. (John 3:23)*

**KINGS require subjects**, those who will do as they are instructed by the king. This is the foundation upon which much of the church is based, having developed in this fashion over the past 2000 years. We have denominational and individual church kings. All too readily we accept it as the 'normal' way of doing things.

However today, God is calling us into **KINGDOM relationships**, intimate relationships with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ of like minds. Those who have a deep hunger for more of God and truly desire to become more like Jesus. It is through such relationships, guided by the Holy Spirit, that God's kingdom on earth will expand in a way we have only dreamed of in the past.

### **3. RELATIONAL WITH THE WORLD**

The third area of relationship required of us is interaction with non-believers.

This is, of course, highlighted in what we call 'The Great Commission'.

*19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20a)*

Over my Christian life I have tried, in my own way, to do my best to fulfill this command of Jesus. I am not an evangelist in terms of gifting, and am, in the natural, shy about sharing as much as I personally should about Jesus on a one to one basis. I am not ashamed of Christ but, as I mentioned earlier, tend to be a better listener than talker.

However, I did pen the Walking With Jesus discipleship course, which has helped numbers of people to be pointed in the direction of Jesus, as well as helping many believers deepen their relationship with Him. Some time ago, a lady came into our shop. She saw WWJ course on the counter and commented and commented to Cathy Mumby, our shop manager, that she became a Christian through the course. Unfortunately I was not there to speak to her. But it was a boost when Cathy M. told me!

Over the years of being in full time ministry, I have been able to share the Gospel message in many different countries and have seen good numbers of people come to Christ through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Many more have received Holy Spirit baptism, and large numbers have also committed to a deeper level of discipleship, of obedience to the will of the Father in their lives.

To be honest, I thought I had been doing a reasonable job in doing my bit to fulfill the Great Commission - and that I would continue to do similar things over the years to come.

Imagine my surprise then when, during my trip to Africa, the Lord changed my direction! "How could you Lord? Surely, 'full-time

ministry' is what you have called me to, and is the ultimate way of serving you?"

God is full of surprises! More often than not, we don't want to know of them, preferring to carry on carrying on in our comfortable ways! GOOD in themselves, but are they really GOD? (one less O!)

I thought I had left the commercial world behind forever. In the natural I love the challenge of business. But God had called me to the 'better things' of full time ministry forever, or so I thought.

I have had to change my thinking on 2 counts. Firstly, the assumption that full time ministry is better, and secondly, that forever is not in God's vocabulary when it comes to His desires for me as an obedient servant. For a servant must always be available to, and obedient of, his or her master's call.

The Lord had other ideas! As I so often find out, His ways are not my ways! And His way for me is not my way for me! I so often hear people ask the Lord to fulfill their heart's desire, but very rarely hear anyone ask Him to fulfill HIS heart's desire for them! This is a key difference between the world of kings and the world of the kingdom.

When I returned from Africa, I had to go through a revolution in my thinking. "Lord, do you really want me to go back into business? Why Lord? Surely what I am doing now is the best way to build your kingdom?"



The Lord needed to show me some things! For in the world of kings, the realm in which most of the church lives today the king, the pastor, leader or tele evangelist is put up on a kingly pedestal (and pulled down!) by the people, other leaders, and sometimes even the state. To become a king today, you need an educational qualification and an official appointment by a human organisation, such as a denomination.

Please see my heart! I am not saying that all formal church leadership is evil and wrong! It has served the church over the past 2000 years and will continue to do so in the future. But the Lord is saying that there is a different way, one that has always been there, one which He now wishes to develop in a way that will build His kingdom upon the earth before His great and glorious return.

The Lord was showing me He wished me to witness into the community, that His kingdom will be built through His people interacting with others, by becoming His light to the lost.

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, had this understanding in relation to preaching. *"No sort of defense is needed for preaching outdoors, but it would take a very strong argument to prove that a man who has never preached beyond the walls of his meetinghouse has done his duty. A defense is required for services within buildings rather than for worship outside of them."*

Mother Teresa and Brother Andrew, who come from the most structured church of them all, also had this kingdom revelation in terms of working in the community.

Kings have palaces (church buildings) to which people are invited in. The kingdom however, is built by disciples being the living Word in their own communities and in others to which the Lord calls.

So now, through Seekers Megamarts, we provide a service into our local community, selling recycled clothing and other goods at prices people can afford, and using surpluses, both money and clothing, to fund projects in Africa, to help the poor there help themselves.

The organisation works on a mixture of paid, partly paid, and voluntary Christian and non-Christian staff, all depending upon people's circumstances. Kathy and I work voluntarily, as Kathy still provides our family income through her paid nursing job. Our managers are paid a full wage. Some others work hour for hour, paid and voluntary, others receive petrol vouchers to contribute towards their transport costs.

Bibles and Christian books given to us are given away to others. The Walking With Jesus Course is also available free of charge. We are open about our Jesus motivation, but do not evangelize overtly.

The organisation is still evolving so we don't pretend to have all the answers.

To be really honest, living this life, where people can see me warts and all, is far more difficult than sending out teachings over the internet and visiting countries for a short time, speaking at conferences or crusades. Even when approaching this type of ministry with the attitude of a servant, it is all too easy to slip into a kingly mode!

While honesty about my shortcomings etc., has always been something that I hope has made this ministry somewhat different to some, interacting with people through the challenges (and there are many of them currently!) of day to day life and business, truly forces one to servanthood, if one wants to be like Jesus.

Of course, the buck stops with me. There are hard decisions I have to make, as much as I can under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had to too! He chose to die! But my primary purpose and motivation is to serve others, not to build up my own kingdom.

*"Lord, help me I pray, to put You first, and to serve others as you would have me do, so that your kingdom may come, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen."*

SIX YEARS ON.....

'Seekers' has now gone through its cycle, with various ups and downs, and and was finally sold to a large competitor whose desire was to see us out of business, one way or another!

Ironically, as I write this I have received a call from my travel agent advising me that he has made bookings for me to take my first trip back into Africa for 10 years! Leaving in a month!

I am looking forward to this, for much will have changed, both for and in me, and in Africa, over the past decade!

Season follow seasons in God. Thank you Lord.

## TESTIMONY SUMMING UP

Now my testimony will finish - I think! Not because I am on my last legs (as far as I know!) but because we have come to the present, and none of us knows what the future will bring.

Today, as I look back at my life in Jesus, I can see huge changes that He has made in me. Probably the biggest though, is in my perception of me. Let me explain.

I come from a background of success. My father was a 'Sir', a knight of the realm, honored for his work to the city of Napier where he was Mayor for 18 years. And an exceptional one too!

At school I was successful. Not the best at any one thing, but good enough at most things to become the Best All Rounder of my final year.

In business I had great success but also big failure. It was through bankruptcy that I came to Jesus.

When I entered the Christian world, this success looked destined to continue. The Walking With Jesus course was written with amazing leading from the Holy Spirit and widely distributed. A series of evangelical meetings was held and the Holy Spirit came in power. The Lord was with me.... until!

Until it was time to break me! Criticism came after the meetings, followed by despair and depression, followed by a break from public

ministry, followed by a call, several years later, into 'full time' (sic.) ministry, followed by a second bankruptcy through attempting to make financial provision for myself.....

The Lord was breaking me, changing me, taking a little - maybe a lot - of the me out of me.

Nearly 14 years ago now, our 'Praise God it's Monday' (PGIM) weekly ezine started. Through PGIM, public ministry started again. Travel and overseas ministry opportunities arose. Although the Holy Spirit accompanied me with His presence and power, it was as if I was hitting my head against a brick wall with the revelation and understanding the Lord had given me. It wasn't until more recent times, firstly in South Africa, then in other places, that the Lord finally put me in touch with others with a similar understanding.

During the times of my travels, in many places, I was placed on placed on a pedestal, particularly when the Holy Spirit moved powerfully. Others, of course, tried to use me, and the Spirit, to meet their own agendas! Through God's grace and His work in breaking me in the experiences I have mentioned, I was able to resist most of this. Also, sending a Westerner to Africa on 50 cents a day helps keep pride under control too! For one cannot easily be self-reliant or proud in such circumstances!

However, within each one of us, there remains the natural human attitude of a king. A hunger for bigger things, a bigger ministry (or church), all of course, to 'help' the Lord more. But the Lord doesn't need help! Well, help of our making, that is!

Since being led back into business over the past 8 months, I have had even more of these 'king' attitudes removed from my life. And the attitude of 'the kingdom' installed to a greater degree. *"Lord, use me as you will. I am all yours. My life is not my own but yours, Lord."* If I don't minister in public again, that is okay with me. If He uses me to minister to millions, that is okay too.

Don't get the impression I am perfect or that my submission is complete, for the 'me in me' still rises up. But, as I look back over the years I can see that it is getting less in my life.

I don't know what my personal future will bring. While none of us do, the more we submit our will to the Father's, the less control we have over our future direction!

I had no expectation to go back into business. Currently the pressures are huge as we are faced with the repercussions of our hugely over regulated society, here in New Zealand. I am not sure what the next week will bring. But I do know that the Lord has my future in His hand. All He has told me is to work through the challenges one step at a time. If I am to stay in business, that is okay, if not, that is okay too. May His will be done.

Now, I am about to embark on my first trip to Africa for 10 years. I will be a different person to when I last traveled, and hugely different than when I first visited.

I am attempting to be obedient, one day at a time. What God chooses to use me for tomorrow, and the day after, is up to Him. My desire to be a 'spiritual king', as seen in the eyes of the world is dead. Gradually, I am learning that 'Jesus (truly) is Lord'.

**Lord, you are the only King in my life. May Your kingdom come upon the earth.**

# CHARACTERISTICS OF KINGDOM PEOPLE

## 1. BROKENNESS PRECEDES HOLINESS

The primary teaching throughout the church today is 'come to God and your life will (at least) improve or become very successful.'

However, this is not the true message of the Gospel. We are to come to God because we are sinners who need to repent. Repentance is to be the core of our faith, and is to be outworked in a changed life. It is no good simply being sorry about our sin. True repentance is putting sin behind us and walking in the opposite direction.

Unfortunately, I have found that the brokenness required by God in my life in order to transform me into the image of Jesus comes primarily from failure rather than success. From the valleys of life rather than the mountain tops.

Jesus said:

*17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"? 18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (Luke 20:17-18)*

This is why the message of the kingdom today is no more popular, probably even less so, than it has ever been. To inherit the kingdom we must let go of ourselves, our own precious traits, our own



personality, our own desires and ambitions, even our own wallets(!), in order to be molded by the Father, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit into the image of Jesus.

Brokenness comes through trial and tribulation, through failure, through a real need of God, for He is all that we have left.

Brokenness too, comes in stages. It is not a single experience which we go through and come out the other side 'smelling of roses'. For, like peeling an onion, our human personality has to be peeled off, with tears, layer by layer, in order that God may penetrate and fully take over our lives.

To show you that this is not just me, I quote from a very mature (age and nature) man of God, Ron Mc Gatlin: Visit [www.openheaven.com](http://www.openheaven.com) .

***God is preparing a holy people. If you are enduring the pain of failures in life you may be on the road to holiness.***

***The cost of victory is often the pain of failures.*** *The price of holiness is the laying down of self which may involve failures in natural life. Failed dreams, failed business endeavors, failed relationships, failed ministries and other failures are painful tolls paid along the road to the victory of true holiness. These can all be a part of the return of mankind from natural existence in a fallen world into pure holy spiritual life in the higher realm of holy supernatural heavenly living.*

***Often those of us who seek God with our whole hearts will encounter the failure of our past lives.*** *All that we honored and*

*trusted in to provide what we needed and wanted in life crumbles along the road to holiness. It is like there are toll booths along the road. At each toll booth we must pay the painful cost of more failure in our old natural lives. In the seasons between toll booths we enjoy increased holiness as God fills the void created at the previous toll booth. We feel really good until we approach the next toll booth where more cost must be paid. Another failed area of natural life brings fresh pain. It is hard but the price must be paid if we are to continue on the road to holiness. Again, we feel the pain of death as more of our old life is handed over at the toll booth. And again we have more of God and less of us and less of our old natural lives as we move on down the road.*

Money, status, position, ministry or church size, even volume of good works, are worldly measurements of success that belong in the realm of kings, not that of the kingdom.

Holiness costs! Kingdom living costs! Costs everything! Costs our life! Maybe literally as well as spiritually! Requires ongoing change! Ongoing repentance! It is not easy! Extremely hard even! But the result of becoming more like our Saviour and Lord, Jesus, is surely worth the cost. Isn't it?

I haven't fully got there yet. Yet more layers to be stripped and tears to be shed! But I am prepared to pay the price.

How about you?

## **2. BIBLE READERS**

A second characteristic of kingdom people is a love for the Word of God. They read it, absorb it, and apply it.

This is only natural, as the Bible is all about Jesus, our Saviour and Lord.

#### *The Word Became Flesh*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. (John 1:1-2)*

In Old Testament times, under the Aaronic Priesthood, the priests were the ones who had access to the written law and would convey it to the people.

Jesus came as the fulfillment of the Law, introducing the Age of Grace. His personal teaching is recorded in the four Gospels. The Gospels reveal the heart of both His message of love and of His life of obedience to the Father's will. Unfortunately today, we emphasise the message and largely overlook the life Jesus led!

#### *The Fulfillment of the Law*

*17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Matthew 15:17-18)*

Paul, in particular, having been brought up a good Pharisee, took the teachings of Jesus and molded them into a basic theology, laying out the primary tenets of the faith.

Of course, it took time before the Bible, including the New Testament, was finally compiled, by the Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicea, in approximately AD337.

Then followed a period of 1100 years or so when the church basically went back to the old priesthood system, largely of necessity, as there was no way of printing the Bible during those times. The priests read (and interpreted to their advantage) the Bible to the people, most of who could not read and write anyway, let alone understand the Latin in which the Bible was written.

At that time, Bibles were made one by one by legions of monk scribes in monasteries. Each one was a work of art. And they were very expensive. Only nobility, or maybe well off merchants, could afford to have one made for themselves.

In the 1400's this started to change. The first English Bible translation was written. Details from Wikipedia follow.

*JOHN WYCLIFFE*

*Born c.1320s*

*Ipreswell, England*

*Died 31 December 1384 (aged about 64)*

*Lutterworth, England*

*John Wycliffe (pronounced /ˈwɪklɪf/; also spelled Wyclif, Wycliff, Wiclef, Wycliffe, Wicliffe, or Wickliffe) (mid-1320s – 31 December 1384) was an English theologian, translator and reformist. Wycliffe was an early dissident in the Roman Catholic Church during the 14th century. He is considered the*

*founder of the Lollard movement, a precursor to the Protestant Reformation (for this reason, he is sometimes called "The Morning Star of the Reformation"). He was one of the earliest opponents of papal encroachment on secular power.[1]*

*Wycliffe was also an early agitator for translation of the Bible directly from the Vulgate into vernacular English in the year 1382, now known as the Wycliffe Bible[2]. It is believed that he personally translated the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and it is possible he translated the entire New Testament, while his associates translated the Old Testament.[3] Wycliff's Bible appears to have been completed by 1384,[4] with additional updated versions being done by Wycliffe's assistant John Purvey and others in 1388 and 1395.[5]*

In the next century, mass distribution became possible with the invention of the printing press, the first Bible being published by Johannes Gutenberg around 1447.

This distribution of the Bible in the languages of the people gave rise to the Reformation, around 100 years later.

Of course today, we in the West own so many Bibles, so many translations, that most of us no longer truly appreciate what we have. Of course, this does not apply to so many believers in the rest of the world, to whom the Bible remains a very precious possession, if indeed they have one at all.

I have found that those who have a desire to become like Jesus are particularly drawn to the 4 Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, for in these writings the real heart and life of Jesus can be seen. Each Gospel is authored from a different perspective, relating to the

understanding of a particular people group. Matthew is written from a Jewish perspective, Mark to the Romans, Luke to the understanding of the Greeks and John to Gentile believers. From the combination of all four, we still today, can get a beautiful picture of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Since the days of Paul, both prior to and after the Reformation, man has built many varying theologies that have led to the divisions in the church we see today.

Kingdom people however, are seeking not a new theology, but rather, to be the light of Jesus to the increasingly dark world we live in today. As Jesus Himself said:

*14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)*

Kingdom people are not particularly interested in theological arguments, but rather, in living the life of Jesus they see reflected in the precious Word of God, their Bible, which they know well through constant reading.

### **3. JESUS FOLLOWERS**

The third characteristic of kingdom people is that they are Jesus oriented above all else. They love Jesus, follow Him, and desire to be like Him.

This sounds so simple - what all Christians should be!

Sadly, in the church, particularly in 'Spirit filled' streams, people tend to follow a pastor or leader rather than Jesus. The reality of this is seen when a pastor falls. People leave the church and many leave God too. Also, pastors have the almost impossible job, of placating people who are there to have their own needs met, rather than to surrender all to Jesus.

This 'king' style leadership (often initiated by the people rather than the pastor) has led to the church operating in a non-biblical way. You see, our church system today, both in organisation, and often in preaching too, does not follow the teachings of Jesus, nor the pattern of the New Testament church.

This leads to all sorts of problems for kingdom people within the church as others do not understand why they are not prepared to 'follow the system'.

When church leadership have differences pointed out to them by kingdom people, these people are told not to be rebellious, to be real, to be pragmatic rather than idealistic. We must keep 'bums on seats', we can't offend people, hierarchy and rules are necessary to keep 'good order', etc., etc..

The natural tendency of man (more so than woman!) is to take the church back towards the that of the Old Testament with its formal structure and hierarchies, overlaid with a message of wellbeing and success when one accepts Jesus as Saviour.

However this is not the real message, or example, of Jesus.

The message of Jesus was one of both repentance and love. The example of Jesus was both forthrightness when dealing with sin (particularly so to the 'religious' people), coupled with grace, love, humility and servanthood (to the will of the Father and to serving others). This resulted in personal hardship, finally ending in death on the cross. He was opposed by the Romans, the religious hierarchy and often, the common people too, when He taught that their way of life was ungodly. The apostles too, faced similar challenges in their lives, with all except John being martyred for their faith. Following the example of Jesus is not an easy life!

When the New Testament church was formed, it was relational not organisational, organic not structured, family not hierarchical. And it seems, the church in Jerusalem, at one stage had 5,000 odd adherents, so size is not an excuse for excessive formality.

Again, when kingdom people draw attention to 'non-Jesus', unscriptural activities in the church, they receive the same reaction He did! This has been true, down the ages. Consider Wesley, Booth, Finney and many other great 'revivalists' who preached it as it really is! Effective? To many - yes! Reviled? By many also!

Preaching is a hugely difficult thing to do in the image of Jesus! I wonder why so many want to do it! But then, I am human also, and in the natural can understand the desires and status that accompany it. Paul also understood the problem and gave the answer:

*5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (2 Corinthians 4:5)*

The consequences of preaching a wrong message are dire!



*8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:8)*

My friend (I hope you still are!), do me a favour. Please take the time out to read right through the 4 Gospels, putting aside preconceptions, theology etc., and simply absorb Jesus, His character, His life, His teachings, for He comes alive through them.

It could change your life. It will revolutionise your ministry.

Are you prepared to take the risk?

#### **4. A LONELY WALK**

A fourth characteristic of those who truly seek the kingdom is loneliness. Loneliness not only from worldly non-believers, but also from most fellow Christians.

This is not being super spiritual or elitist, but simply stating reality of those who desire a deeper spiritual walk.

Nor is it unique to today. Rather, it is a common characteristic among the 'spiritual greats' of the Old Testament from Noah, who was rejected by his contemporaries when building the Ark, to Moses, isolated for 40 years in the desert, to the prophets in general who loved their people, yet God more, as can be seen in the unpopular messages they gave and the inevitable negative responses they generally received in return.

Jesus Himself often withdrew from society too.

*16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5:16)*

While it is great to have the support of others, ultimately the walk of the cross is one which we must do by ourselves, just as Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane, in personal agony while His disciples slept.

*36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. (Matthew 26:36-40)*

Yes, His ultimate experience of the Cross was walked through alone.

The Tabernacle of Moses was a pattern of the church today.

The people could come in through the symbolic gate of salvation to the Outer Court of repentance.

Smaller numbers (the priests) entered the Holy Place, symbolic of entering into the realm of the Holy Spirit.

However, only one man, the High Priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God Himself.

While Jesus 'positionally' opened the doorway for us into the Most Holy Place, symbolically shown when the veil in the Temple was supernaturally ripped from top to bottom. Not many however, choose to 'experientially' enter that place of total submission to the will of the Father, to let Him take over their life.

In a general sense, we can be saved, baptised and join a traditional or evangelical type of church. We can be filled with the Holy Spirit and participate in a charismatic or pentecostal fellowship. But there is no formal way of entering into the kingdom, the bride, the overcomers, or however you wish to describe the final church of God. For this is a personal matter between you and God.

A walk by oneself. A walk of trial and testing. A walk not understood by the majority of Christians who are content with salvation itself or with the addition of Holy Spirit release.

That great servant of God, A. W. Tozer, expresses this far more eloquently than I.

*The truly spiritual man is indeed something of an oddity. He lives not for himself but to promote the interests of Another. He seeks to persuade people to give all to his Lord and asks no portion or share for himself. He delights not to be honored but to see his Saviour glorified in the eyes of men. His joy is to see his Lord promoted and himself neglected. He finds few who care to talk about that which is the supreme object of his interest, so he is often silent and preoccupied in the midst of noisy religious shoptalk. For this he earns the reputation of being dull and overserious, so he is avoided and the gulf between him and society widens. He searches for friends upon whose garments he can detect the smell of*

*myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces, and finding few or none he, like Mary of old, keeps these things in his heart.*

*It is this very loneliness that throws him back upon God. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." His inability to find human companionship drives him to seek in God what he can find nowhere else. He learns in inner solitude what he could not have learned in the crowd that Christ is All in All, that He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that in Him we have and possess life's summum bonum.*

If you find yourself in this position today, be encouraged, for you are not alone. There are others experiencing the same personal isolation as you. And, of course, our God is our greatest friend, more than we could ask for or need.

## **5. HELPING OTHERS**

The fifth characteristic of kingdom people, one that seems contrary to last week's topic of loneliness (but isn't), is that the prime motivation in our life becomes one to help others. Not building one's own kingdom, but contributing, as one of many, to the development of the kingdom of Jesus upon the earth, by doing the will of the Father, as communicated by the Holy Spirit. Actually, that is, not just in theory!

Ironically, when your motivation moves away from simply fulfilling religious obligations such as those found in church programmes (even though they may help others) to seeking out God for His unique, personal purpose for you, you will find that God will continually place others in your path. The closer you get to God, the more practical use to Him and others, you will also become. For closeness to God does not result in a

monastic existence but rather, in reaching out into the community as God leads - and He will lead!

A little honest testimony is in order here!

At the time, about 15 years ago that the Lord called me out of business into 'fulltime ministry', I believed that I would never again get into business. For 7 years I worked in what I saw as the 'better way', of ministering to people spiritually through the revelation the Lord graciously has given me. I expected to be doing that, receiving and imparting, until the day I went to be with Him. For in the church, we are taught, consciously or unconsciously, that the highest way of serving the Lord is in ministering to people spiritual needs through the application of the ministry spiritual gifts of Ephesians.

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

So you can imagine my consternation and confusion when, in Africa 9 years ago and upon my return, the Lord led me into the second hand clothing business! "It can't be you Lord! Must be me wanting to get back into business! Or satan trying to lead me astray.!" It was. It wasn't. It wasn't.

For the Lord, through a lot of hard work mind you, has opened the doors to set up 'Seekers Megamarts' to benefit the people of Africa (well, some of them!) and as an added bonus, the people of the communities in which we operate.

No, it hasn't all been easy and plain sailing. We face the usual challenges of setting up new businesses. Problems with Councils. Problems of rapid growth. Problems with theft. etc. etc.

Yet in 18 months from literally starting with nothing, then latterly in difficult economic conditions, we built up a relatively large business, all paid for. It simply has to be the Lord!

Prior to going to Africa, the Lord showed me that He had given the main revelation He wanted to, and my role would change from receiving to disseminating what He has given. The way we are doing it, is completely 'outside the square' to normal ways of religious thinking.

The problem is, in the church, we have separated 'ministry' from the rest of life. This fits the pattern of our Greek way of thinking, where the different aspects of our life are compartmentalised. The Jewish way however, the pattern on which the Bible is based, is operated on a 'whole of life' basis.

So I now understand that 'Seekers' is as much ministry as is 'Walking With Jesus'. Not a second best option to so called 'spiritual ministry'. For this business is ministry. It belongs to the Lord, under a trust setup. We continue to live and walk by faith, as we draw no money from the business. People are helped and witnessed to in many different ways, from value clothing to the availability of free Christian literature, to personal interaction between believers and non-believers, both staff and customers.

You see the kingdom incorporates the whole of our life, not just the supposed, 'spiritual side'.

Now years later, Seekers has been sold and I am about to embark on another trip to Africa, after 10 years away.

At the time of setting up Seekers, Kathy and I attended a prophetic seminar, run by our good friend Rodney Francis. We had a small group session of practicing prophecy, which was hugely interesting, as many of the people had never prophesied before. Wonderful! But it was also interesting to see how other people viewed Kathy and I. We are pretty (well me, not so pretty!) ordinary people, but surprisingly to us, what we are doing here seems to be an encouragement and example to others. People we did not know personally knew about us and witnessed to the fact that we were putting our faith and beliefs into action. Putting other people before ourselves.

Such is the way of the kingdom.

**May we too, give our lives to Jesus and to others.**

## **6. ALL BELONGS TO GOD**

Who are the biggest liars in Christianity?

We all are, when we sing the old hymn...

*"I surrender all, I surrender all,  
All to Jesus I surrender,  
I surrender all."*

For very, very few of us can sing that song truthfully, in every area of our lives.

Yet, surrender of self and all our possessions to Jesus is the sixth characteristic of kingdom people and kingdom living.

This is, of course, a particularly relevant subject today, as the world financial system faces potential meltdown, basically caused through excess credit creation within the system.

I am a trained economist - many, many moons ago! Part of our study was based around ways of avoiding a repeat of the mistakes of the Great Depression of the 1930's. The lessons of excessive credit creation have certainly been forgotten, particularly over the past 25 years. It will now be interesting to see whether the means of dealing with the situation work!

The problem with possessions is that ultimately, they tend to own us rather than we own them. This is particularly the case when credit is involved. As Proverbs says...

*7 The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.  
(Proverbs 22:7)*

Possessions give a false sense of security.

Jesus warned:



*15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)*

However much we hate to admit it, we are all motivated by money and possessions. This is the same for both the poor and the billionaires, wherever they live. The poor by their desire to acquire perceived security, and ironically, the rich, by the fear of losing the security they have.

Probably the hardest decision those with possessions have to make is to give ownership over to God. It's easy to sing, 'I surrender all', but so difficult to do in reality. 'Retail therapy' has become the West's most rampant disease! And the cure, as we are starting to find out, is painful!

Material prosperity is actually the single best weapon satan has of taking our focus and dependence away from God. Yet, large sections of the church have been preaching this false doctrine for decades now! Yet so few have, maybe until now, wanted to hear anything said against it.

I can only give my testimony.

I was, at the Lord's clear leading, about to enter into fulltime ministry. I thought that I didn't want to be a burden upon others, so I would undertake a large property development that would provide ongoing rental income for our family to live on. A 'good' idea, but not a 'God' idea. One too many 'o's!

Costs went up, values came down, and we lost everything.

"Now, maybe you will really start to depend upon me, David."

"OK Lord."

"But there is one more thing yet, David! That remaining money you have from your inheritance that provides you with some security - you must give it away!"

"But Lord.... Ok Lord, if that is what you want".

For the past 13 years we have lived, day to day, on Kathy's income as a nurse. Whenever we have needed anything extra we have had to wait upon the Lord for it. It hasn't been easy! It is so unnatural to my natural nature! Travelling to Africa for 2 months on 50 cents a day was very challenging! No, not all our 'wants' have been met, but our 'needs' have. And we have gradually learned that He knows best, and are growing to understand how our wants are based upon that fleshly nature residing within us.

We now own only our household furniture. Also there are now only the 2 of us at home. We have downsized from a (all rented) 4, to a 3 bedroomed home, to a small 2 bedroomed unit. Each time we have downsized we have given away more possessions. For, reality is, we have had nowhere to store the excess! And interestingly, we have found that we have not really needed them anyway! It is not easy to do however! We are still learning!

God is calling His kingdom people to give everything, both spiritual and material, over to Him. I am not saying you have to follow the same path that we have, but you must be prepared to, should God require it of you.

**May we be willing to submit EVERYTHING to Him.**

## **7. RELIANCE UPON GOD**

The seventh characteristic of kingdom living is a reliance, a true dependence, upon God.

Of course we, particularly in the West, blithely declare in church on Sunday our dependence upon God, but spend the rest of the week focused upon earning sufficient money to make ourselves independent of Him!

Now, do we worship God ourselves, but take 'spiritual bytes', participating in worship led by others who are, at best, seeking to take us into the presence of God, at worst, putting on a performance?

In our works too, we show our independence, as we endeavour to do God's work for Him through the programmes that we participate in that keep us busy but are not God driven.

In each of these 3 areas God desires us to be dependent upon Him.

The Lord's Prayer has lost its popularity today, particularly in Pentecostal/Charismatic circles, supposedly because of its rigid form, but in reality, probably more because of its unpopular content!

It is the kingdom prayer!

*10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)*

This is followed by principles of kingdom living, the way in which the kingdom on earth will be brought about.

The first of these is;

*11 Give us today our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)*

You see, God knows the primary motivator that takes us away from Him - self-sufficiency. He desires, indeed requires, dependence upon Jesus, rather than our VISA card.

Of course, a year or so ago, you may well have laughed at me, but with the current financial implosion, the promise of 'daily bread' is becoming more real, even desirable!

For my many readers and friends in areas where you truly do have to rely upon God for your daily provision, even though you do not like it, you are truly blessed. For God wants us to be dependent upon Him. And collecting treasures on earth, no matter how small, take us away from Him.

Kathy and I are trying to live this way. We own only a few household possessions, having cut down and down on the size of the homes in which we have lived. We are endeavouring to financially live a kingdom lifestyle.

Secondly, we need to depend upon the Lord spiritually. I love worship! I love worshipping with others! I love, on the rare occasion, entering into the Holy of Holies in worship.

However, group worship is not the essence of spiritual dependence upon God. In a way, it is like cheering your team on at a football match. Excitement and emotion flows. It is great fun, a real buzz, but rarely intimate.

To be truly spiritually dependent upon God we must wait upon Him to hear from Him. Not in the spectacular, but in the quiet intimacy of one to one relationship. Such was the experience of Elijah;

*11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:11-30)*

God is not deeply found in the group experience of worship, wind, earthquake or fire, but in the 'gentle whisper' of a one to one encounter. This is where our spiritual intimacy, dependence and instruction truly come from.

Thirdly, our works. Yes, a subject James is very hot on. Our faith needs to be reflected in works. But these need to be 'God' works, not 'good' works. The number of 'o's' is critical.

God does not want us to be tired out, to become burned out, through doing continual gooooooooood works!

God works are specific. The more we rely upon Him, the more He will lead us in what to do. And He will not have us substitute works for relationship with Him and with our family. I certainly need to be reminded of this often! For I am project rather than people motivated.

There are millions of good projects out there but let us not forget:

*3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:3)*

**May we rely upon the Lord in all areas of life. This is the way of the kingdom.**

## **8. A KINGDOM FOCUS**

What do we put first in our life?

Family? Security? Church? Evangelism? .....Or the kingdom?

A kingdom focus is of paramount importance to kingdom people.

*31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:31-3)*

Our focus shifts away from what will benefit us now personally, to living a righteous life, seeking to be the light of Jesus to the world.

*8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. (Ephesians 5:8-10)*

Our focus too, moves away from earthly success and recognition towards eternity.

*19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)*

Reality is, not liked by many people, that building the kingdom in the here and now requires sacrifice in the here and now to bring it about!

Many Christians look to God as a 'Father Christmas', but truly walking with Jesus costs us everything. Jesus sacrificed His life for us and we are to sacrifice our life for others if we are to live His lifestyle. We must 'lose our life' for Jesus.

*25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. (Matthew 16:25-7)*

Such is the kingdom focus of kingdom people. By giving up our lives for Christ, we find a new life, a life of spiritual joy, satisfaction and love, beyond that which the world offers.

As we are literally seeing today, the riches of this world are temporary and uncertain, while the kingdom lifestyle is a foretaste of what is to come for those who are fully committed to the Lord.

**Come Jesus, come.**

## **9. LIFE OF POWER**

The vexed question of 'spiritual gifts'!

Under the current kingly church system spiritual gifts are closely controlled, to be exercised by the king and princes, not ordinary 'pew people'.

We are controlled by a misunderstanding of the application of the principle of 'good order' spoken of by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. We take the sensible advice of Paul about the restriction of prophecies and tongues speaking and interpretation in larger gatherings to mean only the 'elevated experts' should be allowed to participate at all times. In fact, the way our church meetings are organised encourages spectatorship rather than participation, just as we are used to at a big football game. The crowd (congregation) may cheer (hallelujahs), but only the teams (worship team, prophets, preacher, etc.) play, under the watchful eye of the coach (pastor). Most often the pastor is a 'player/coach' in the church situation.

However, the more we develop a kingdom understanding and lifestyle, the more we realise the truth of the first words of Paul in chapter 14 of 1



Corinthians that set the scene for the discussion to follow. We are ALL to seek spiritual gifts.

*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. (1 Corinthians 14:1)*

Indeed, every follower of Jesus has been given spiritual gifts.

*7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)*

Christianity is a participatory, living organism, not a spectator sport!

Some time ago I attended a seminar by Rodney Francis and team of 'The Gospel Faith Messenger' ministry, [www.gospel.org.nz](http://www.gospel.org.nz) where a group of people from many different church situations, hungry for more of God, were encouraged to utilise their spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of prophecy.

Small groups were held where EVERYONE was encouraged to prophecy over the others in the group. The results amazed all who took part. The accuracy of the words was amazing. Both to the receivers and the givers! Most had never tried to prophecy before! If we are simply content to spectate rather than participate, these gifts will pass us by.

The closer we get to God, the closer He gets to us, and the more of Himself and His ways He reveals to us. Closeness to God is not limited to the realm of the professional. He is waiting with arms outstretched for every follower to embrace His ways, the ways of the kingdom.

Within the formal church there is little opportunity for the majority of Jesus followers to exercise their spiritual gifts. Indeed, I have observed that kingdom seeking people, when exercising their spiritual gifts,

*8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)*

are often rejected by others, working in the human spirit, for the revelation and understanding they have. We need to seek out others with a desire for more of God.

Walking with Jesus is to be a life of power. We are all meant to walk in the power of the Spirit of God. We need to seek and develop these gifts in our life, learning not to be content with what we have.

*31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:31)*

**May we apply the promise of Jesus today.**

*7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)*

## **10. SELF FUNDING - THE BETTER WAY**

This will cause controversy, but it needs to be said.

People are given ministry gifts, to be used to develop the saints to do the works of service and evangelism, resulting in unity, maturity, indeed Christlikeness.

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

This obviously has not happened - yet!

We can all think of a thousand reasons why.

But I will suggest here, at the risk of being lynched, that a primary reason is that our leadership motivation is based on the principles of kings rather than kingdom. Kings must have subjects in order to be kings. Subjects need to be kept in subjection in order for the king's kingdom to remain and to grow.

Kingdom leadership motivation however, is to develop others towards maturity through the application of the lordship of Jesus in their lives. Dependence is to be upon God, not man.

The heart of the problem, as in many things, is money!

Regarding leadership remuneration, there is both a good way and a better way. Paul was very aware of this in his own life.

Payment for the 'elders' (Please note, not apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers, for these are roles, not positions.) are justified. This is most clearly expressed in the Amplified Version.

*Let the elders who perform the duties of their office well be considered double worthy of honour (and of adequate financial support) especially those who labor faithfully in preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17 Amp.)*

So, if you are being paid for being in ministry, you are acting Biblically.

However, in the next chapter, Paul brings up some of the problems that payment brings.

*3 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. (1 Timothy 6:5)*

Now this is an extreme situation. However, in my travels, in places where jobs are scarce, I have seen many situations where people have started up churches in order to obtain an income.

In general though, the motivation of most paid leadership is far more worthy, particularly at the beginning of a ministry. But, as time goes on and followers increase, there is an increasing temptation to protect 'your' flock, for they are the source of your income. So one becomes more circumspect in what one teaches or preaches, in order not to offend 'the hand that feeds you'.

Paul was very aware of this situation and throughout his letters he often talked about not being a burden upon the people he ministered to by working in his occupation as a tent maker. For example;

*9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. (1 Thessalonians 2:9)*

**The advantage that this gave Paul was that he could preach and teach the truth without fear or favour. Of course, Paul did receive occasional support from those he ministered to, but he was not solely dependent upon others' provision for his next meal!**

Paul understood that this, the kingdom way, was the better way. For through this we can simply encourage people to follow Jesus, to obey the will of the Father as revealed by the Holy Spirit, in their lives.

Today, amongst kingdom people, there is a move away from full time paid ministry towards generating other sources of income, to enable them to speak 'the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God', as true witnesses of God in the community, rather than just at a trial in a courtroom.

I can testify to this personally. For I could not write this, if I was dependent upon my readers for my next meal, for paying my rent, and our other living expenses. Yes, we struggle at times to pay the ministry bills. But the cost is worth it to bring this to you.

**I hope and trust you think so too!**

## **11. LIFE CHANGE RATHER THAN SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES**

Expressed in religious terminology, the kingdom person seeks *habitation* rather than *visitation*. They seek to become like Jesus rather than simply experience the excitement of moves of the Holy Spirit, commonly called 'revival'.

In this day and age when the world has shrunk in size through fantastic communications and transportation technologies, moves of the Holy Spirit, both real and false, are quickly publicised and flocked to by charismatic believers from around the world.

Christians, particularly Charismatic Christians, pray for revival to come to the world and more specifically, to their area. While this is good, the reality is, there has never yet been a permanent revival! Revivals come and revivals go. Some short term change may be noticed but it fades with the passage of time.

There simply has to be something more!

And there is!

Unfortunately though, habitation isn't as spectacular as visitation, and much harder to live.

Visitation is only referred to twice in the New Testament. In both cases it is more to be an example to unbelievers rather than a specific blessing to Jesus followers. For example:

*12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:12)*

In earlier revivals we saw many people convicted of their sin and come to the experience the saving, life changing grace of Jesus. In more recent times however, 'revivals' have been enjoyed by Christians from around the world but have had very little effect upon even the local community. You may draw your own conclusions.

The way of the kingdom is 'habitation', where the Holy Spirit 'inhabits' us and is given our permission to make changes in our life.

*16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)*

Jesus Himself told us:

*15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:15-17)*

While we accept this in theory, very few live out the life implicit in the 'habitation' of the Holy Spirit within us. This is not new. Even Paul spoke about it:

*5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)*

The real revelation and life of the Holy Spirit comes not from seeking spiritual experiences but through obedience to the will of God.

*21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” (John 14:21)*

Kingdom seekers understand this principle and endeavour to apply it to their lives. Of course, we are not always successful, but we have the forgiveness of the cross to lift us back up again when we fail.

**May the Lord be with each of us as we seek a deeper relationship with Him.**

## **12. HUMILITY**

In today's world, humility is misunderstood, and perceived to be a weakness.

The best definition I can come up with is, '**putting Jesus first**'. While this may seem a strange definition to many, it encapsulates what true humility is all about. For when we put Jesus first in our lives, by definition, personal position and pride takes a back seat. Additionally, the more we put Jesus first, the more the needs of others come ahead of our own. This is reflected in the wisdom of Jesus as to the greatest commandment of them all:

*34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.  
35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36*



*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40)*

The whole Bible therefore, is based around the concept of humility. True humility is not a weakness, a wishy-washy deference to everyone, letting the world run roughshod over you, as people think.

Rather, true humility is service, service (love) to God and service (love) to others. It is a positive action, not a negative reaction. Humility, service and love are intimately intertwined.

The day, when I was working in the fields tending my flowers, that the Lord 'asked' me to go into ministry, He gave me the name, 'Walking With Jesus Ministries'. People now say what a brilliant name it is. Well, it was His idea, not mine! I would probably have followed the norm and called it 'David Tait Ministries'. But I think that you might be able to see, as I now can, that the focus would have been in the wrong place. Upon David Tait, not upon Jesus. God knows so much better than me!

Unfortunately, under the 'kingly' church system, we often place more emphasis upon the king bringing the message of Jesus rather than looking to the true kingdom king, Jesus Himself. We look up to the pastor, teacher, evangelist, prophet or apostle and place them on a pedestal. A pedestal from which, I hasten to add, we pull from under them very readily if we perceive they make a mistake, or we don't like the message they bring!

Surprisingly, it actually takes the strength of humility to preach or teach the true words of Jesus without fear or favour. For the truth is not popular. Never has been, never will be. Once we are prepared to be unpopular, along with His message, forgoing the approval of people in preference to that of God and His Word, then we will know we have developed humility in our life.

Kingdom people, as we have mentioned before, are God centred, focused upon Jesus, prepared to promote others, particularly Jesus, ahead of themselves. Jesus always placed the Father first, even unto death!

*39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."(Matthew 26:39)*

**Such sacrifice, such humility, still today, is the way of the kingdom.**

### **13. UNITY OF SPIRIT**

Unity is a vexed question in the church today, one put aside by most because of its perceived impossibility.

There have been various attempts to bring unity under the current 'kings' era of the church. Of course, to achieve unity under the present system, there must only be one king! The nearest the church has come to this was in an earlier age, when the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church was designated as 'God's man'. Because this was not God's way, the situation did not last, culminating in the schism between western and eastern branches of the church in 1054. Around 500 years ago now, when the Protestant Reformation took place, divisions multiplied exponentially!

Today there are estimated to be 33,830 protestant denominations worldwide! Oh dear! Unity is not upon us!

Let's have a look at some Scripture.

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 **until we all reach unity** in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the **fullness of Christ**. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

Leadership is to bring people to maturity, to Christ likeness, in order to reach unity.

*7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and **his bride has made herself ready**. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (**Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.**) (Revelation 19:7-8)*

When Jesus returns, His perfect bride (singular) will be waiting for Him. Not a grey, divided church, but a united, pure white bride.

There will not be any one organised, structured, God chosen, 'Super Bride Church'. That is an Old Testament concept, relating back to the Aaronic Priesthood. Israel was 'made holy' through the sacrifices the priests made on the people's behalf.

Under the New Covenant however, we are individually responsible for our own salvation and living a holy life. Our leaders are there to guide us, not to live our life for us!

God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, lives within each believer. We are directly answerable to God for our individual actions. Leadership is there to guide but not control, nor to be substitute 'god representatives' on our behalf. We cannot delegate our 'religious responsibilities' to someone else!

Therefore, we need to look at unity in the light of these New Covenant principles.

Jesus was into spiritual unity. God's love and God's glory is reflected through unity.

#### *Jesus Prays for All Believers*

*20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. (John 17:20-24)*

As mentioned above, Jesus is coming back for one bride.

So how is this unity to come about?

It can only come through the Holy Spirit, whose role is to guide us into the truth.

*13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. (John 16:13-14)*

God's glory, God's unity, comes through the absolute, 100% submission of our lives to the Holy Spirit, no matter the cost. This is the objective, not yet fully achieved, of kingdom minded people.

Reality is, we don't fully listen to and apply what the Holy Spirit is saying. We filter everything through our humanness.

A while ago I received prophecies from two respected American prophets. One said that Barak Obama would return America to its former glory while the other indicated he would lead it to its destruction. Well, only one can be right! It is likely both are wrong! It is no wonder that the world mocks such a divided church! A church with a little of God but more of self.

Actually, in the greater picture of the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, it matters not at all which, if either, of these is true. For the kingdom transcends national boundaries and is dependent upon obedience to God through the Holy Spirit, not wealth and power, for its establishment.

The role of the Spirit is confirmed by Paul.

*9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"— The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:9-12)*

As Paul goes on to say, the world does not understand the things of the Spirit. I would suggest, that we in a divided church, only partially understand also.

Again, from the first Scripture quoted above, we have yet to reach the spiritual condition prayed for by Jesus for us. It was a future promise.

*22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:22-3)*

### **Such is the way of the kingdom.**

Sadly, there has never been unity in the church, not even in the supposed halcyon days of the first apostolic age, prior to 100AD. Paul discusses the issue.

*On Divisions in the Church*

*Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.*

*Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)*

Right from the beginning then, people have, as Paul states it, been 'worldly' and followed the leadership of men instead of Jesus. This is a sign of immaturity in the church, of adherents being 'milk' feeders rather than mature partakers of 'solid food'.

All leaders are simply to be servants, allocated leadership roles by God to achieve His purposes. No single leader has it all.

Jesus is our foundational leader.

*11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)*

The Holy Spirit is to be our guide.

*16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)*

A huge responsibility comes with being in leadership.

*17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:17)*

We are all, both leaders and led, to follow God's will through Jesus.

*21 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. (1 Corinthians 3:21-3)*

Unity cannot be achieved in a church based upon current systems. Two thousand years of experience has proved that! The church needs to change.

It is only in recent times that the book of Hebrews has come to be truly understood. So it is logical then to conclude that the message it contains applies to the church of this day and age.

*25 See to it that you do not refuse him (ie. Jesus) who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. (Hebrews 12:25-27)*

To inherit the kingdom our focus must be upon God, not men.

*28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28)*

To receive our full inheritance, to be 'sons' of God, we must be led by the Holy Spirit.



*14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. (Romans 8:14-15)*

True unity is unity of spirit. It cannot be built not within a structured setting but informally amongst those completely sold out to Jesus, those who allow the Holy Spirit to lead them into the perfect will of the Father. Those whose motivation is to see the kingdom of God come upon the earth now.

*2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:2-3)*

The cost is great but the reward unbeatable.

*4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:4)*

Lord, we conclude our discussions on the transformation of the church by praying, as you commanded us to:

***10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)***