# A CATHOLIC NO MORE

*Posted on February 20, 2025*

**Category:** John Fifteen

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## INTRODUCTION

Yesterday was the last day of August, 2008, and I was walking in a park.

Not much of a park, this park, a ten minute walk-around at a slow pace. I leave my van on the north side, across from Coopers groceries and close to Rutland Health Center, and walk the perimeter counterclockwise, just like thirty years ago.

Thirty years. My youngest grandchild is now about the same age as was my eldest child. Seen so much in these thirty years. Been to hell and back more than once.

There are some changes. The walk-on concrete slabs bearing donors' names stretched much farther into the park. The tall swings are gone, and the graffiti-laden washrooms are locked up – I guess they just tired of the vandalism. And there's a new child's playground at the far end.

The war memorial kiosk is still there, of course, and the same small groups lying on the grass smoking whatever. And the pines, dozens of them, stretching high, screens around the trunks to protect from pine beetles. Lots of grass, lots of shade, lots of pine needles and pine cones.

It was here, thirty years ago, *A Catholic No More* was birthed.

The Lord had recently spoken three words to me, "Write a book." That's it, three words. I instantly sat up from my horizontal position on the couch. Write a book? I had never written a book. Never wrote much of anything.

For two or three months I spoke in tongues, asking the Lord to give me the interpretation in the form of the book He instructed me to write. Around and around (and around and around) this park I walked, praying in the Spirit. Mornings, afternoons, after work, after church – I paced and prayed, prayed and paced, not allowing myself to begin the book, not even in my thinker, until I sensed the pray season had elapsed.

It's hard to pray in tongues hour after hour, day after day. But this was my first real assignment and I

wanted it to be good. I had no idea the book would be based on the words of Jesus, Matthew 7:24 - 27.

Today I begin the task of putting my typewritten *A Catholic No More* unto my computer (soon to be on my website, larryjones.ca) making changes as I go, adding insight to insight, rewording, deleting, rearranging. Interesting to see how I was back then, the way I perceived, the history I lived.

Since, I have been into and out of evangelicalism. Fortunately, having been burnt sufficiently, I did not entirely leave my skepticism behind and still had eyes to see what most evangelicals were, and are, blind to. There is nothing in *A Catholic No More* that is not equally relevant to the evangelical, and this book could just as well be titled *An Evangelical No More.*

From then to now He took me through the storms. I was wounded often, most wounds self-inflicted, and always He applied healing ointment. When my well ran dry He replenished. Always there, always patient, always the faithful and true witness.

To Him - my loving Christ, my hero, my captain, my object of worship - I rededicated this very small work in the hopes He will make much of little.

P R E F A C E

It was an angry Paul who wrote to the Galatians, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Jewish christians were trying to impose circumcision and the Law upon them, and the gullible Galatians were adopting their false doctrines.

Yes, angry. Recent was the founding of the Galatian church, and already the perversion had begun. The message of redemption and freedom burning in the apostle's heart, the good news of Jesus Christ revealed to him by Christ Himself, was already diluted. The good news no longer good, the people were now burdened with something heavy and tasteless. Yes, the Adders and Subtracters had arrived, taking away from and adding to, thinning and polluting, imposing conditions and bondages.

It had been a good word Paul preached to the saints. Profound, actually, yet simple. A message of salvation and forgiveness, justification and freedom. He told of the promise made by God centuries previous, and the fulfillment of that promise in the person of Jesus Christ.

The gospel had revolutionized Paul's life and he was urgent to take the life-giving message to the pagan world. He traveled and proclaimed. Under such aggression many bastions of paganism and ignorance crumbled. Nation after nation were visited by this man of holy energy. Nothing withstands the awesome power of the Word in pure form. The untampered Word is sharp and brutal, and darkness submits to its light. Soon the entire world would be conquered for Jesus, and sadness and sickness and spiritual death would cease to be.

he quivered. his kingdom of darkness would soon be obliterated by the saving knowledge of the ancient promise fulfilled. Only a few years since Christ's resurrection and already strongholds of christianity had been established - in Jerusalem, Corinth, Galatia, and even Rome. he had roused the Roman empire against the early church but to no avail. Beatings and imprisonment only resulted in new waves of expansion. Insults and threats and teasing purified rather than stunted the early church. What to do?

Always the cunning tactician, satan tried an alternate strategy.

he realized if he could simply remove the "two-edged sword" from the church's grip, the church would be crippled and eventually die. And so his second campaign against the body of Christ began, a crusade to loosen the church's hold on the Word, the promises, the truth - an assault of lies and compromise.

he surmised, I surmise, the assault must come from within the church; outsiders lacked the necessary credibility. And so he he did what any reasonable person would have thought impossible - he raised an army of spokesmen within the body of Christ, mostly Jewish converts whose love for legalism and tradition surpassed their love for truth.

Thus the rise of the Compromisers. The Adders and Subtracters. A pathetic people who had gone back. Having returned to their yoke of slavery, their aspiration was now to seduce the entire body to join them. A religious people these Compromisers, these Adders and Subtracters - but not illegitimate. True sons - not bastard tares but the reborn and blood-washed - damaged the Father's kingdom in a way outsiders could not, their devastation a fruit of betrayal to His Word. What the enemy failed to do through his own he did through His own.

Compromise dulls the two-edged sword, the only power of God unto salvation. As salt water and fresh become salted when merged, so also lies and truth become a lie when merged. As truth sets free, fiction imprisons.

he, the father of lies, knowing all this, perpetuated his lies through the spokesmen he seduced (who, in turn, seduced others, who in turn....). Their harm must have hurt Paul much more than the stripes and prisons and deprivations. When he left they came. He the sower, they the ravens plucking his seed before germination. Always the soldier, Paul retaliates:

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.*

*Oh foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*

*Do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

Ruthlessly Paul wields the sword of the Spirit, admonishing the wayward saints to act like offspring of the freewoman, Sarah, and not Hagar the bondwoman. He didn't seek middle ground but

exposed the Compromisers as false and treacherous.

*I wish those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!*

But that was all yesterday. What about today?

Today - not a nice picture.

Today the same enemy has raised the same army of spokesmen to wrestle the same Word from the same church. But unfortunately there is no Paul - at least I haven't heard of him/her. Indignation is scarce. Men are not men and women are not women. The Adders and Subtracters have paved various ways. Negotiators and Compromisers seat each other in places of prominence. The lordship of Christ in heaven, the lordship of christians on earth. Where is the retaliation?

*A Catholic No More* is a retaliation.

*A Catholic No More* is a book of hard sayings.

It is a message to that group within the body of Christ that might be best described as 'traditional charismatics'. And, equally, to those considering themselves evangelicals.

*A Catholic No More* is a resistance to the present-day onrush of misapplied conviviality, discretion, hospitality and accommodation in most charismatic, denominational and interdenominational quarters.

*A Catholic No More* is a backlash against tolerance given to humanistic reasonings and traditions that have subverted the christian message.

*A Catholic No More* is a word to many charismatic and evangelical leaders who, after a time of testing in various fiery furnaces, proved themselves faithful to old ties, and led their groups back into the stagnation of old wineskins.

It is a view behind the curtain of "Praise the Lord!" and "Alleluia!" enshrouding the charismatic way and into the real world where the masses live, where ecstasy of multitudes rescued from darkness spirals down, down, down into real desperation as these same born-again believers are brought to painful crossroads as the Holy Spirit reveals contradictions between the Word and many teachings and practices of their traditional churches.

*A Catholic No More* is a reminder that our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but rather powers and principalities of darkness in which the sword of the Spirit is our most potent weapon, and softening or altering it for the sake of accommodation, or being double-minded in our allegiance to this sword, will certainly dull its edges. We are in a battle of good verses evil, truth verses lie, and compromise, while bringing momentary reprieve, weakens the awesome power of Truth, and the cause of our Christ suffers.

Compromise. How skillfully we compromise. The more we do it the more we do it; drinking from its

cup makes us thirsty for more. Every christian community is pressured to compromise, and to those capitulating it becomes a way of life.

Compromise insults God. Compromise is a return ticket to to the old yoke of slavery. Compromise is the chief weapon of the enemy. Oh, if someone could just go get Paul - perhaps borrow a time-machine from a neighbor - and bring him to our day. What would he say to us? I unleash my imagination....

*Oh foolish christians! Who has bewitched you? Has the church not matured in wisdom since my day? Must history repeat itself?*

*How is it you turn back again to the weak and worthless things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? Why obey traditions of men over the Word of God? Do you not know you are slaves to the one you obey? Do you not know new laws bring old curses?*

*Some want to change the gospel of Jesus Christ. They want to win you over to themselves. They are to be condemned! No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Only the house built upon the rock of Christ's words can hope to stand. The church of my day was more powerful than yours, with more signs and wonders. Yet, except for a remnant, it eventually collapsed.*

*Christians, wake up! satan is still the god of this world, and his campaign against the body of Christ has lost no inertia whatsoever. If you lay down your sword you lay down your most potent weapon. The Word, pure and undefiled, can still be likened to a mighty fire, like a hammer that can break a rock to pieces. Scripture, not visions and prophecies, is the basis of doctrine - for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. The Word is the power of God unto salvation. It is above refining - don't mess with it!*

*I fear, lest somehow your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Let there be no adulterating the Word of God.... the Father still insists on being worshiped in Spirit and in truth.... a different gospel is a perverted gospel.... do not be bound with unbelievers.... come out from their midst and be separate.... do not seek man's approval.... if you yet please men you cannot be the servants of Christ.... unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it....*

Paul! How you loved Him! You were totally dedicated to Jesus. Oh, that our consecration would one day equal yours. A compromiser you weren't. You stood up to Cephas himself. A man of holy energy. They beat you but could not quench your spirit aflame. Though a prisoner, you were a slave to no man. No hardship was a hindrance, such your fervor for Jesus.

Paul! How my generation of believers needs your voice of righteous indignation. Your angry rebuttals. Your passionate call to reason and repentance.

There are so many winds of doctrine.... so much compromising.... such a falling away from simple devotion to our Lord....

Chapter One

# ROCK OR SAND?

*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

*Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:*

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.*

Jesus concluded His sermon on the mount with these incisive words as recorded in Matthew, chapter 7, verses 24, 25, 26 and 27. These words are promises. Jesus Christ, being the truth, is incapable of a misleading or exaggerative statement. We have every reason to believe Him. He promises and then fulfills the promises as one responds to them. He releases His words and watches over them, much like the shepherd who releases the sheep from the corral and watches over them. This chapter, and much of this book, is based on the two above promises.

A wise man builds his house upon rock. The rock is the sayings of Christ. The sayings of Christ are actually an echo of the pronouncements of the Father. ("The Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.") The sayings of Christ, then, is the Word of God.

These two promises are impossible to misinterpret. If my house, which could mean either my entire life or certain components of my life, is founded on God's Word it will never (never, never) collapse. No matter how vicious the storm or severe the flood waters, I will still be standing when it passes.

The fool builds his house upon sand. Sand is a substitute for God's Word. The Lord's second declaration is equally plain. If my life is not built upon God's Word, it will surely (surely, surely) fall. When the storm passes and the flood waters recede, I will not be found standing.

*And great was its fall.*

*Its fall.* To the unbeliever hearing and rejecting (or ignoring) the salvation message, it means eternal doom. To the christian insisting on building her life on sand, it means third-rate living here and loss of

eternal rewards there.

That most outside will never embrace Jesus is tragic. That most within the church have accepted a lesser life than what is available through obedience to Christ's sayings is no less tragic - because the end result of a wasteful life in the church results in fewer persons being saved.

A newly born christian, exuberant in joy and energy, often will eventually withdraw into former timidity. A dynamic Paul shrinks to a doubting Thomas - and occasionally a traitorous Judas. Genesis to Revelation is a sad record of God's chosen turning back. How could the early church, so powerful and dedicated, so bold and loyal to Jesus, almost entirely disappear within several centuries? Did God withdraw His promises, giving with the right hand and taking back with the left? How could the dark ages have ensnared the world?

*Grass fire* is an expression I have heard older pentecostals use to describe the moving of the Holy Spirit in earlier days within the prairie provinces. A grass fire is mighty but short lived, and so were the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Miraculous healings, signs and wonders, revival, deliverances - and then nothing. The christian community became as it was.

How many tradition-based churches in the last decade experienced a potent Holy Spirit visitation, bringing new life and hope, and then returned to the same stagnation? How many millions have lost their zest and zeal for Jesus, like salt having lost its flavor, and retreated from the front lines of the great spiritual warfare for men's souls?

Sadly, most christians, *certainly not all,* eventually become unproductive and lukewarm, relinquishing their armor of love, shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, replacing them with a white flag of surrender. Having returned to surface living, timid and confused, they refuse involvement in the great commission.

The fire has gone out.

Where there was faith there is now unbelief. The gospel remains in their mouth. They live in memory of yesterday. They used to talk about Jesus - now it's church and community and methodology and tradition. Reports were exciting - now it's woe and despair. Testimonies of victories are now testimonies of wilderness experiences. Once hungry and teachable, now critical and angry. Relatives and friends no longer see Christ radiate through their countenances. All the Lord wants to accomplish through these fallen ones will never happen. The candle has been doused. The house has fallen.

*And great was its fall.*

Don't believe me? - look around. (Looking is okay. The Lord likes us to look around if our attitude is right. Most books are authored by those who spent much time looking around.)

There is a common denominator for every failure, every misconception, all defeats: In some way the

Word of God was not properly applied to a given situation or, worse yet, the Word (the Bible) had not been unquestionably accepted as the standard of one's life. Again, look around. What do *you* see?

WHY, OH WHY??

All occasionally stray from God's Word. At best, we are on the road heading for perfection; none has arrived and none will while down here. None can boast of a perfect record of obedience. The learning of His ways takes longer than a lifetime. There is, however, a major distinction between he who occasionally wonders from *The Book* and he who ignores it, or worse, substitutes it for another word.

Why would a believer exchange the Word of God for another standard? The proclamations of God for other proclamations? The infallible for the fallible? Why, oh why??

Exchanging is most unreasonable. Like leaving the freeway and traveling a dirt road. Like storing milk in the cupboard. We all have our list of dumb, but for many on the top of their lists is exchanging the Word of the Lord for the word of man. (We're not talking oopsies - those we will always have. We're talking betrayal - deliberate, premeditated compromise.)

Now I want to introduce you to Terry. Terry is an invention of my very imaginative imagination who will help with the *Why, oh why??* question. Terry is.... let me see.... twenty-seven years old.... yes, a big man with a soft spirit, a wife and two kids.... let's make them twins, a boy and girl, sevens years old. My guess is that Terry's story, a patchwork of real life stories familiar to me, is similar to yours as it is mine.

Please understand, writing about Terry is writing my observations of my colleagues in the charismatic movement to which I was adjoined for nearly five years, and the influx of outside Negotiators, Adders and Subtracters. Fictional Terry represents non-fictional people.

Terry is less than two years old in the family, having discovered his Christ at a charismatic prayer meeting in the basement hall of his catholic church. Didn't want to go to the prayer meeting that night, could barely tolerate sunday mass, and besides, everything he heard about the prayer thing sounded weird and scary. But Sheri, his wife, was pushing it, and he had to admit to a certain curiosity.

Well Terry's life was changed that night. Wept openly for the first time since childhood as he experienced the wonderful person of Jesus Christ, and received Christ as Lord and Savior. Terry became one of millions of born-again catholic charismatics. That night he was instinctively drawn to one of the ornaments in the living room, a Bible. The biological marvel of a newborn intuitively extracting milk from mother's breast is paralleled by the spiritually newborn hungrily feeding on the Word. For Terry, the feeding frenzy lasted months.

Like all of us, Terry entered the family with quirks and bad habits. And a pocketful of pride and fears and prejudices. And a particularly loathsome trait that overshadowed everything else - Terry was cheap.

Terry hated to depart with anything of value, especially money. Major purchases caused nausea. He was gifted at overlooking needs of others, yes, even his own family. Logic told Terry the less he gave the more he would have. And yet he seemed to have so little, sliding deeper into debt.

The Lord's ways are far above man's ways. The Bible teaches to the degree we give we will receive. "The generous soul will be made rich." Since Terry sowed little, he reaped little. His house was built on the sand of human logic rather than on the rock of *The Book*. A friend - let's name him Barry - who was more caring than critical, prayed for Terry until he was able to receive with understanding the Bible truth of giving and receiving. Which brought Terry to a crossroad.

CROSSROADS

A crossroad is a place of decision. A crossroad is a test of loyalty. For a christian, a crossroad will either reinforce one's commitment to Christ or weaken that commitment. The road of ignorance has come to an end. There is a stop sign. Two choices, turn left or turn right.

To the left is disobedience - more of the same, more bondage, more pain.

To the right is Christ.

The gentle Holy Spirit has revealed a misconception and misbehavior in Terry's life. And now he has a decision to make. To turn left would be the easy and familiar way, the road of stinginess and hoarding, both of which he had a lifetime of practice. To turn to the right would be difficult. It called for change. And trust.

Terry wavered a bit but eventually made a decision to place his trust in God's Word rather than the world's system of human reasoning, and made the right-hand turn. Guess what. Slowly his financial condition stabilized and he is safe now. But that's not the best part of the story.

Choosing Christ's words are choosing Christ. Obedience brings bonding. Bonding brings every good thing. The winner is not the one with the most toys; the winner is the one gaining more of Christ.

AND ANOTHER CROSSROAD

Soon after his conversion Terry discovered his family. And noticed some serious problems. An unkind person could have called his children terrors without straying far from truth. Sheri was weakening under the constant strain of their misbehavior. So what did Dad and Mom do? They smothered the darlings in love and adulation, thinking surely the kids would repay them with

improved behavior. Didn't work. The twins enjoyed their power, and challenged both Dad's and Mom's authority at every occasion.

Terry had been affected by the world's ever changing theories of child development. He had been convinced that an abundance of love would replace any need for discipline, and often responded to misconduct with affection. Terry was given a book expounding biblical teaching on child discipline and control. He discovered that he, Terry, was the head of the family under Christ, the shepherd (under-shepherd) and priest. God placed certain demands on him including bringing his twins in subjection to both him and their mom.

The book explained why the kids misbehaved. Just like adults, children are under a constant pressure from unseen forces to rebel and disobey. Unlike adults, they lack the savvy to resist. They must rely upon their parents to keep them from doing what they ought not do. The father must set the guidelines and enforce them by whatever means necessary, yes even if that entails an occasional spanking.

So that brings our Terry to another crossroad. The sanity of his Sheri and the spiritual, mental and emotional future of the children depend on his decision. Yes, Terry came through again, and sensed the power of the Lord to carry out this righteous intention. Sat the kids down, explained the new rules, explained his no-tolerance policy, explained the consequences of disobedience. Sure they tested him - they had to know if Dad had grit or was he just a wuss.

Terry marshaled them one at a time into their bedrooms. When it was all over he felt weak, his color was gone and his big shoulders drooped. But the kids felt great! Soon the *ouch!* was gone and so was the insecurity and pressure of warfare. A new respect for Dad and Mom evolved and Terry got more hugs than ever. In the area of discipline, Terry was building his children's lives upon the rock of the Word.

AND ONE MORE CROSSROAD

There is another crossroad our Terry is facing right now, perhaps the most crucial he will ever confront. Not only is he tempted to stray from biblical teaching, he is actually considering replacing the Bible with another standard. Events bringing him to this precarious situation are bizarre and complex.

Terry has been loitering at this crossroad too long now. He stands there quivering, undecided. I fear for Terry. He is tempted to invite a false god into his life, one that will cause a degree of separation from the Christ who saved him, from the Father who adopted him. The false god is catholicism, and the substitute standard is a mixture of catholic doctrine and the new, ever-changing charismatic teachings.

While Terry is an imagination, his story is not. It is my story and that of many friends and loved ones,

of thousands if not millions of traditional charismatics and multitudes not included in the definition of that term. Perhaps it is your story.

Terry's narrative began with bad advice. After his awesome, life-changing conversion to Jesus, Terry had to swallow feelings of foreboding every time he thought about returning to his traditional church. Everything in catholicism felt foreign to him now, and he just knew he could not remain a practicing catholic without compromising the Word. He took his dilemma to his friend Barry, a pentecostal who had previously witnessed Christ to him. Though Barry had been raised in a Bible-believing church, he discouraged Terry from leaving the catholic church, suggesting that Terry had a unique opportunity to evangelize where he and others had not.

Barry's advice could well have caused Terry, and Sheri, to get on a path of serious spiritual decline.

A few years previous Barry would never had given such counsel, would never have pointed Terry in a direction he himself wouldn't go, would never encourage a babe in Christ to place himself in harm's way. But now Barry was caught up in a strange mentality, a wind of doctrine, that has seized much of the body of Christ.

As I said, Barry is a pentecostal. Barry watches certain televangelists who discourage catholics from leaving their church. Now to see into the heart of many (not all) televangelists, let's look into the heart of one. Let's call him.... Gerry.

Gerry is a televangelist with the calling of an evangelist. Gerry aches to lead people of all faiths to Christ. Including catholics. That ache, unfortunately, surpasses faithfulness to Christ's sayings (and therefore Christ Himself). Gerry regularly invites priests, born-again priests, to his program, and that's okay. They share the good things of the Lord and give exciting reports of the wondrous happenings in charismatic circles. Great. Gerry wants to be accommodating so he calls his guests *Father*. Not great. Gerry says positive things about the catholic church and makes favorable comparisons to evangelicalism. Very not great. Now back to listening Barry in a faraway province on the other side of the country.

*Oh, oh,* thinks Barry, well versed in Scripture, *Didn't Jesus teach us "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven."? And yet,* thinks Barry some more, *Gerry really is such a well respected televangelist throughout christiandom. Even my local church supports Gerry's program. Maybe I ought not to be critical.*

So compromised logic bounced from televangelist Gerry to Barry and now threatens our Terry. Gerry, you see, had long ago discovered a better way than, "Come out from among them and be separate", and "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers", and "Do not touch what is unclean". That better way is, "Blossom where you are planted", and "No church is perfect", and "Do not break unity". And with passion Gerry preaches that improved word to millions of evangelicals and millions of catholics. So the message of compromise and appeasement, the love gospel corrupted, reached our very young and gullible Terry.

And then there's Harry. Harry is the leader of the prayer group - let's call it People of Charity prayer group - meeting every Wednesday in the church basement of.... yes.... St. Mary's. Both Terry and Sheri esteem Harry, as does everyone. Harry is fervent and Harry is nice. Harry has seen lots of changes in the few years as group leader, and felt the weight of responsibility as the group quickly swelled from a dozen to a hundred and fifty. That's a hundred and fifty catholics, mostly. Nervous catholics. Catholics wondering *Am I doing the right thing?, Does the priest approve?, What does the bishop think?* Now Harry has been influenced by a number of books written in the last five years (including a couple by televangelist Gerry).

Books, books, and more books. Books about community living. About submission to authority. About accountability. About structure in prayer groups. Books explaining how to merge catholicism with the new experience, and how the born-again experience wasn't that at all but just a church renewal thing, and how it would be offensive for catholics to get baptized in water rather than accept the legitimacy of their infant sprinkling. Authored by Negotiators and Accommodaters and Controllers, the writings were a fusion of the biblical and non-biblical. Dutiful Harry read them all, and man is he confused.

It was a thing, especially with those in leadership (called the core group) to carry a Bible around, usually the New Jerusalem Bible. But the Bible was adhered to less and less with every book read. Leaders did not search the Bible for direction, but fretted about which wind of doctrine to adopt. With compromise comes a fog of confusion. Lots of compromise, lots of fog.

Harry made sure the core group consisted of only those who proved themselves loyal to the cc (catholic church), which certainly excluded the few pentecostals who attached themselves. A priest on board, however, added credibility to fretful catholics. The entire core group, then, consisted of those who chose the alternative of catholicism over the Bible. Wednesday night teachers were chosen from this group, and no spokesperson dared confront the issue of clashes between church and *The Book*.

Can you see Terry's dilemma? I mean the guy is just a baby christian. All these voices, Barry and Gerry and Harry, as well as friends and peers. And there were other voices....

Terry and Sheri attended a Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship banquet once a month. The food was great, praise time excellent, the speakers quite adept at holding the crowd's attention. Some speakers wisely stayed within the perimeters of the Word, but others did not. For Terry and Sheri, the line separating *Jesus loves catholics* and *Jesus loves catholicism* got thinner with every gathering. *It doesn't matter what church you attend as long as you love Jesus* wasn't said, but was implied.

So there's our Terry at a most crucial crossroad. To build on the words of Christ and face the wrath of catholics and disapproval of many pentecostals, or give allegiance to alternative words and be accepted by those he loves. Make no mistake, choosing Christ meant getting out of the cc, like now. Don't think Sheri wasn't making her case for staying with friends, for staying out of controversy, for

just staying.

You see, Sheri was a real mess - emotionally, I mean. Nothing was going right and she was hurting bad. It was Sheri who kept pounding on Terry to go with her to the prayer meeting. It was Sheri who turned the volume up so Terry would hear televangelist Gerry while he was having breakfast and getting ready for work. It was Sheri who introduced Gerry to Harry the leader. And it paid off. Sheri was way beyond thrilled when her Terry got born-again and saved, when her man was transformed from a lukewarm catholic to a radical for Christ. Everything was great.... at least at the beginning of the charismatic cycle. Charismatic cycle?

## CHARISMATIC CYCLE

Having all power in this fiction, I could make Terry a real hero of the faith. I could write of his determination to follow Christ at all cost. "Though none go with me, still I will follow!" "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God!" He turns his back on the fickle dictates of man, bears his cross gladly, and steers his family away from People of Charity, out of the trappings of catholicism, never to return.

But no. That's just not the way of most traditional charismatic catholics, and this is all about the typical, not the extraordinary. Sorry, can't do it.

Terry chooses the path of least resistance, and follows the clearly marked path made for him by Barry and Gerry and Harry and a multitude of other Compromisers and Negotiators, Adders and Subtracters. *Perhaps,* thinks Terry, *I will one day become the Billy Graham of catholicism and lead many into the kingdom. So I have to bend a little. What harm can a little tradition do?*

## TRADITION

Tradition. One dictionary defines tradition as an inherited pattern of thought or action. For the purpose of this book tradition is defined as *inherited patterns of thought or action that conflict with biblical standards of thought or action.* Traditionalism is *the practice of such patterns,* and a traditionalist is *one practicing traditionalism.*

Man loves custom and ritual and often chooses them as god. He finds security in the familiar, and compliance assures him of acceptance of the like-minded. The traditionalist does not tolerate examination of his package of traditions because that would be disloyal to the group. He is content to live and die for, and pass on to loved ones, the empty causes of unreasonable decrees.

Sadly, a new convert in Christ will often return to the religious society from which Christ has set him free. The old love, so visible and familiar, usurps the love of the One invisible and not yet familiar. Someone got to him before his roots went deep in Christ.

Traditionalism, like drinking and sexual immorality, is not an overwhelming temptation if occasions of temptation are avoided. Making a decision to remain in the company of traditionalists is both folly and dangerous. We are today yesterday's choices. Good intentions will not keep us from being ensnared once more.

A christian dabbling in tradition can be compared to the child who happens upon a cave. The child can see the mouth of the cave is almost as bright as outside. Nothing to be scared of. After entering the cave his eyes focus to the dimmer light, and soon he can see deeper into the cave. From this new perspective the cave doesn't seem so dark after all because he is now relating it to where he stands, not the sunlight outside. Nothing to be scared of. As he goes deeper his eyes continue to adjust to the darkness. Soon he is so deep he may never find his way out.

BACK TO TERRY

When our Terry made the decision to enter the cave of traditionalism he intended to remain near the entrance - not far from the light of God's Word. Nothing to be scared of. However, his spiritual eyes soon adjusted to the dimmer light every time he compromised. Now he could see tradition from the Compromiser's perspective and the catholic way didn't seem so bad. The problem is not whether or not he can find his way out of the cave of traditionalism, but does he want to.

When Terry first entered his catholic church a few weeks after his conversion experience, he felt a check in his spirit as he was about to genuflect toward the tabernacle. (The tabernacle is a small decorated box containing the leftover communion bread, the bread thought to be the actual presence of Christ.) The Holy Spirit reminded Terry that Jesus now lived within, and he himself was now the tabernacle of the living Christ. Why should he bow to the man-made box as if it were more sacred than his own bodily tabernacle?

But genuflecting before the pretty box is what everybody does. It was expected. Every charismatic genuflected, period. There would be consequences for refusing to do so. Success in the prayer group required a herd mindset, not a smidgen of dissension, complete loyalty to the cause, vague though it be. *Oh well,* thinks Terry as he genuflects, *small payment for an opportunity to witness Christ to catholics.*

In the last while songs of praise unto Mary have been revived, perhaps a backlash against the charismatic movement. This put both Terry and Sheri in panic. Sheri used to love Mary. When she discovered Jesus Mary simply disappeared from her mind and heart. Like gone. Now Terry and Sheri were in a real predicament. *Worship someone other than Jesus?,* thinks Terry. *Isn't that going too far? What would Barry, Gerry and Harry have me do? Harry. Where is that Harry!?* Desperately Terry sought out Harry, hoping, hoping. To his dismay there was Harry singing away. And so were all the others in the core group. Not one dissenter.

Not one!

So Terry and Sheri sang to poor Mary sitting way up there in heaven knowing, through the angel-vine, all these people are praying and singing and carrying on. *Wish they would just stop it already!* Would friend Barry and televangelist Gerry approve of Terry's and Sheri's Mary-worship? How far would Barry and Gerry have them go to gain the approval of their church and prayer group? Would Barry and Gerry have Terry and Sheri pray the rosary? Bless themselves with holy water? Confess their sins to a priest?

Compromise becomes easier with practice, and from Terry's ever-changing perspective traditionalism didn't seem so dark. And Terry realized the less he read *The Book* the less pressure to conform to it. Terry grew resentful of teachings of evangelical fundamentalists, and spoke of the richness of his traditional church. It was us against them. He parroted the charismatic jargon - *headship, submission, group discernment, accountability, renewal* - always one eye on the prize of one day being invited to join the core group.

The demand to accommodate meant the cross - that is, the preaching of the cross - had to go. Can't offend. Offending is unloving. Not that Terry ever did preach the cross to another catholic, not once - that was all to be done some unknown time in the future. The need and intention to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified dissolved as Terry's loyalty drifted from *The Book*.

BAPTISM

Terry was listening to this fellow on television expounding the biblical instruction to be baptized - immersed - in water. (No, it certainly wasn't televangelist Gerry!) Baptism is a public demonstration of one's conversion to Christ, a declaration to follow Jesus at all cost. Baptism is the new believer's first opportunity to prove himself obedient to the One he now calls *Lord*.

Ouch! Terry couldn't argue with what he was hearing, and yet he was well aware his hopes of becoming a catholic charismatic leader would come to an abrupt end should he agree to such a public demonstration. He considered getting baptized secretly, but rightfully sensed a secret baptism was offensive to Jesus. Had Terry taken that step of obedience, choosing the command of Christ over appeasement to friends, it would probably have been a turning point. But he didn't.

You see, Terry is now attached to his church, much more so than before his conversion to Christ. He is loyal to the sacraments, the rituals, the customs, the priesthood. So Terry convinced himself it was non-Christlike to cause disharmony. After all, God is a God of unity, not division. So it was *no* to baptism, *no* to the Word, *no* to Jesus.

Charismatic cycle complete.

Chapter Two

## CHARISMATIC CYCLE

*Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:*

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.*

A charismatic cycle is the promise of Matthew 7:26 and 27 fulfilled in the traditional charismatic quarter of the body of Christ. Jesus promised those who exchange the way of the Word for another way will, in time, come to ruin. There is always a storm to test the foundation on which we build.

*Charismatic cycle* is my expression for the path taken by most charismatic christians. The journey begins at the time of rebirth when the beautiful 'house' suddenly comes into being and ends with the fall of that same house. The final collapse is a decision to replace the lordship of Christ for another lord. Said another way, the spiritual fall of the born-again charismatic is consummated at a decision to exchange the Word for another word.

The cycle starts off so beautiful. I suppose a comparative might be the beginning life of Adam and Eve. What didn't they have? Like this first couple, the born-again traditionalist was to experience an eternity of uninterrupted fellowship with the Son, His Father and His most Holy Spirit. Like Adam, the only requirement to preserving this relationship is faithfulness to God's Word.

### SHERI

Sheri, like Terry and like all, started well. Fresh, clean, enamored with Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit. No one taught her to call the Father *Father*, she just did. Never heard a discourse on the infallibility of the Bible, just knew the book was God's word to her. Joy amplified with every wednesday night meeting. Those were precious times as Jesus responded to their songs of worship with His magnified presence. The praises of those innocent babes in Christ were indeed pure - a sweet, sweet fragrance unto the Lord. Certainly all was well.

When husband became her brother in Christ her elation swelled further. Sheri had ached for Terry's salvation, knowing the biblical warning to those who rejected her Jesus. All was bliss, at least the closest to bliss she had ever known. But.... there is always a storm.

Christian, there is a time to run. To flee. To get the h*** out of there! Sheri heard the warning. No, it wasn't audible, just a tugging of the heart by the gentle Spirit. He sufficiently warned, and anything

beyond sufficient is coercion. However the tugging to get out was offset by the tugging of friends. Her Friend said flee, her friends said please stay. Sheri is at a crossroad. There she stands, quivering, undecided, in real turmoil.

Sheri had always dreamed of the day her twins would be married in her church, St. Mary's Catholic Church, hopefully by Father Jerry if Jerry is still around in fifteen years. St. Mary's is where Terry and Sheri were wed (by Jerry), where their twins were baptized (by Jerry), where they attended countless masses. And it's the place where the People of Charity gathered every wednesday evening. To leave would be tearing.

But to stay would be a betrayal to the Christ who just recently gave Sheri and Terry a brand new life. Or would it? Televangelist Gerry doesn't think so, nor prayer leader Harry, nor Father Jerry who is on the core group of People of Charity. So Sheri takes her dilemma to a friend, Carrie.

Carrie is Barry's wife. Carrie and Barry attend the Full Gospel Businessmen's monthly (often with Terry and Sheri), read the same books, watch the same televangelists, including Gerry. Since Carrie thinks like Barry, her advice to Sheri is the same as Barry's advice to Terry. Stay. Be a light shining in the darkness of catholicism. Poor Sheri is still hesitant, undecided.

Sheri knew if she asked Terry to remove the family from catholicism Terry would oblige, such the power a wife has over the husband in spiritual matters. But she didn't. Sheri didn't choose yes to leave or yes to stay. She just let the days go by, quivering in indecision.

So distraught is our Sheri that she went to see her doctor, Doctor Perry. Perhaps tranquilizers or something is what she needs.

Dr. Perry also attends St. Mary's - once in a while. He distanced himself from religion when pursuing his career as general practitioner, and probably would have discarded it altogether if not for his very devout wife. Perry considers this all beneath him. Doesn't need the crutch of religion. Only reality is that which can be seen and touched. Not to say Perry doesn't empathize for the less enlightened in his church; once being where they now are, he certainly does.

Dr. Perry knew Sheri's solution right off. Sheri is not the only one from People of Charity who came to see Perry. "Sheri", says Dr. Perry, "You and Terry have to make a final and firm decision to either leave the catholic church or stay. Your indecisiveness is causing your grief." "Dr. Perry", replied Sheri anxiously, "Couldn't Terry and I leave the church and remain in the People of Charity prayer group?" "Don't do that, Sheri!" replied Perry emphatically. "That would accentuate your problem. Your prayer group will reject you and Terry if you reject catholicism. Believe me, rejection is something you and Terry don't need."

Sheri takes Perry's pills, samples he had been given by pharmaceuticals, but not Perry's advice. The days continue to roll by.

And then another upset. Sheri's twins are in catechism class learning all about catholicism. Sheri and

Terry are in denial and don't pay much attention. Until the twins each bring home a rosary, excited to show Dad and Mom the new trick they had learned. Good thing Sheri's got Perry's pills or she would have been in trouble big time. What to do? What to do?

To forbid the teacher to teach their kids the rosary would mean a confrontation, and Sheri wasn't up for a confrontation. And Father Jerry would soon find out and an unhappy Father Jerry wasn't good. Jerry had power, lots of it, both in the church and in the People of Charity prayer group. Terry's and Sheri's involvement in the group would be seriously jeopardized. Harry would certainly disapprove, and Harry's disapproval would translate into more quivering for Sheri. There would be no chance of some day being invited to join the core group of People of Charity, which both Sheri and Terry wanted bad, some close friends having already advanced to that position.

*Maybe praying the rosary isn't so bad,* thinks Sheri. *I mean, she's the mother of Jesus, right? Sometimes you just got to compromise for the higher cause.*

The decision to appease man, catholic man and charismatic man, is crossing the line. In Sheri's heart a change of lordship occurred, a conclusion finalized. Man is now accepted master, Jesus is out, dethroned. And that brings us to the completion of Sheri's charismatic cycle. The house has fallen.

*And great was its fall.*

FATHER JERRY

It was Harry who pointed Jerry to Gerry. Father Jerry, prayer group leader Harry sensed, unlike the other priests, wasn't resentful toward the People of Charity group gathering wednesday evenings in the basement of St. Mary's. Harry told Father Jerry about the priests who were regular guests on Gerry's morning television program. So Jerry, not only curious but hungry for.... something, got brave and went for it. Sure enough there was Gerry on the boob chattering with a priest and a nun about Jesus. Jerry was fascinated. Repeated the sinner's prayer. Received Christ. Got saved and born-again.

Jerry knew something happened, inside I mean. It was like a light went on. He entered a spiritual realm he never knew existed. Gushes of joy never experienced shook his heart and soul. Nothing like this ever occurred before, not when officiating mass, not when receiving holy communion, not even when ordained.

After that, Jerry was engrossed with the Bible. Couldn't put it down. Resented the phone and the door bell and appointments. Started at John, like televangelist Gerry and prayer leader Harry suggested. And then got into Paul's letters. Jerry liked Paul, loved Paul's love for his newfound Jesus, so appreciated how Paul gladly suffered all kinds of persecution, even willing to lay down his life. Jerry moved to the book of Acts and found the stories fascinating, the good guys versus the bad guys. And then to Matthew and Mark and Luke. Couldn't get much out of Revelation, kind of scary,

so he skipped it and went to the psalms and proverbs.

You think priests read the Bible? They don't, not much. Jerry was surprised and disappointed he couldn't find the mass in there. Couldn't find the confessional or the sacraments or bishops or popes. Couldn't even find catholics. Found some priests in the New Testament, but they were the guys who had Jesus crucified. Only good priest was Jesus, our High Priest.

Officiating mass became hard, I mean real hard. He had thought and taught when one received the bread (wafer) one was actually receiving Christ, the catholic's version of salvation. Mass was all about changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. Now he thought a woeful thought - maybe the bread was still bread and the wine still wine. Maybe the vestment Jerry wore, the prayers Jerry prayed, the ritual Jerry performed didn't change nothing.

*Why am I doing this mass thing?* Father Jerry asked Father Jerry.

Because you're a priest, Father Jerry answered Father Jerry.

*Can a priest really change bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus?*

Well yeah! Priests all over the world do it all the time.

*But how? How do they - uh, we - do it?*

They just do it. It's a mystery.

*A mystery?*

Yeah, you know, something you can't understand?

*Can't understand?*

Yeah. Can you understand how Jesus did it?

*But that was Jesus.*

And you're His representative. You got the power.

*How did I get this power?*

How did you get it? Our beloved catholic church gave it to you.

*Where did they get it?*

Jesus gave it to them. You know the story about Peter, our first pope.

*But how do I know it's true?*

You accept it by faith. That's what it's all about, isn't it? Faith.

*Like the Jehovah's witnesses and mormons accept their religion by faith?*

Well yeah. But they're wrong and we're right. Our religion is really old, ancient.

*Being ancient is being right?*

Look, we outnumber those guys, we got more tradition than both put together.

*Big means we can change bread into Christ? Wine into His blood?*

So many can't be wrong. If we were wrong we would have folded centuries ago.

*But suppose we* are *wrong? We would be leading millions astray.*

Don't go there! We just couldn't be wrong! And we're not! Period.

*But the Bible says...*

That's your real problem, pal. Just stop reading the Bible and your worries are over.

*Hmmm.*

Arguments went round and round poor Father Jerry's head. Yes, blame it on *The Book*.

Jerry didn't know before reading the Bible that Peter, the first pope, had a wife. *A pope? A pope had a wife and I can't have one?* thinks our beleaguered Jerry. Jerry didn't know the sacrifice of Calvary was to be the final sacrifice for all eternity, sufficient for all generations to be saved and healed completely, making the "sacrifice of the mass" pointless and deceiving. Jerry didn't know catholics do not require a priest to receive forgiveness. (Catholic priests were not around for centuries after the resurrection of Christ.) Jerry didn't know that Joseph and Mary.... how do I say this?.... 'got together' after Jesus was born. *So much for the blessed 'virgin' Mary,* thinks Jerry. Didn't know Jesus had brothers and sisters. Didn't know Jesus was immersed in water and not sprinkled. Didn't know the early saints didn't pray to dead saints. Didn't know there was no purgatory. No indulgences. No holy water. No holy days. No vestments. No mass. No confessional. No....

If you're thinking Jerry is going to pack his bags and scoot, you're wrong. There are many priests who discovered Christ during the days of (what has been termed) the catholic charismatic movement. Few left. That's life, that's fallen man, that's reality. There really are few heroes of the faith.

Jerry took his dilemma to Harry because it was Harry who pointed Jerry to televangelist Gerry who, in turn, pointed Jerry to Christ. Now Harry was by this time a practiced Negotiator and Compromiser, having long ago turned back.

*But Father Jerry, you can't just leave! Think of the division that would cause! People look up to you! They would be shattered if you left. Probably the bishop would shut us down. Where would the people go to learn about Jesus? Remember that priest and nun on Gerry's program, how much love they have for Jesus? They never left our church. They have learned to blend their new life in Christ with the old ways. It*

*takes real love to stay with the people who look to you for guidance. And you know how Jesus commands us to love one another. I know it's hard, but you will get use to it, you know, a little compromise for the higher cause. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.*

And there are other considerations. Jerry has been a dependent of the church for many years. The pay wasn't great - enough for cigarettes and gas for the car and maybe a bottle of scotch once in a while - but everything was free - accommodations, groceries, utilities. And usually there was someone to cook the meals and clean up after him. *Do I really want to become a car salesman?* thinks Jerry. *Could I really handle having a wife? Probably get stuck with someone with a half dozen kids.* People respected Jerry. Being called *Father* was real nice, setting him far above the crowd. Every Sunday and other days throughout the week he had an audience. People heard him. He mattered. Not many jobs offer that.

Like Terry, like Sheri, like Harry, Jerry would pass through the charismatic cycle. Time: less than a year. Cost: the freshness of Christ, the fullness of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, maybe in time his very salvation. Reward: the approval of many.

Jerry will join the vast league of Negotiators and Compromisers, Adders and Subtracters

PEOPLE OF CHARITY

People of Charity is one of thousands of catholic charismatic prayer groups having sprung up in the 70's and early 80's in North America. What has been termed the catholic charismatic movement is way beyond beautiful, far surpassing amazing, certainly awe-inspiring. Call it a major visitation. Or a Holy Ghost outpouring. Or a wind of the Spirit. Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes." It's like the Holy Spirit swept over dead and boring parishes - roman catholic, anglican and others - in search for the hungry, and when He found a yearning heart He wooed. Yes, He had always entreated, but now the drawing was much magnified.

One day the Holy Spirit showed up at St. Mary's. No one expected Him, He just came. Bam! and He was here, just like that. It was sudden, it was shocking, it was beautiful. God did at St. Mary's what only God can do. He came in a torrent of unbridled love and favor and generosity. He poured out "charisms" - spiritual gifts - in abundance. Terry was given visions, Sheri the gift of discerning of spirits, Harry could prophesy, and Father Jerry was given the gift of knowledge. Everyone who experienced a genuine conversion experience, it seems, was given a gift.

Sadly, most at St. Mary's were *not* hungry. Most were resistant and suspicious and anti. But dozens *were* open, hungry, desperate. Jesus, like any good shepherd, responded to that yearning. Soon you had tongue-talking catholics. Demons, lots and lots of them, were cast out. Catholics were prophesying, catholics were seeing visions, catholics healing the sick, catholics laying motionless on

the floor after being slain in the Spirit. It was fun! It was awesome!

And more. Hearts were softened, emotional scars healed, there was a love flow. The name of Jesus was uplifted. People giggled and sparkled and talked excitedly.

But that was all at the starting phase of the charismatic cycle. Like Terry and Sheri and Harry and Jerry, the People of Charity prayer group itself was, too, passing through the cycle. The next phase is confusion, hardships, bad choices and spiritual anguish. At the end of the cycle is a fallen house. Soon People of Charity would be no more.

Another *Why, oh why??* question: Why, oh why, does man have to organize the Holy Spirit out of His rightful place as lord and governor? Why a need to fix what is working?

Always after the Wind come the winds. Various winds of doctrine follow every move of the Spirit. It happened in Paul's day and it has happened ever since. Some Appeasers and Controllers from far away were gifted book writers, and People of Charity people, as millions of charismatics of traditional background, drank deeply from their human reasonings. The sayings of Christ were overlooked, the sayings of these skillful Negotiators embraced. People of Charity found solace and security in being attached to something bigger than they, so they held conferences and invited distant Adders and Subtracters to instruct them. Core group leaders passed on the Appeaser's teachings, teachings such as....

*Headship.* Submit to those above. Everybody under somebody. If it breathes obey it. The group before the individual. Submit, obey, cooperate. It is assumed, of course, that those above know what they're doing, and at the very top is God. And then there's....

*Accountability.* Nobody stands alone, every person must be accountable to someone. No personal walks with Jesus. Everything done by permission only. That way nobody gets out of line, everything is controlled and safe. And then there's....

*Blossom where planted.* We are together and nobody leaves. No sunday evening service at some evangelical church. Interdenominational gatherings are okay if they are not held in a church, and only if they encourage our people not to go astray, to blossom where they have been planted. And also....

*Group discernment.* Whereas the individual may make a mistake, there is safety in numbers. The group's ability to discern is trustworthy and should be leaned upon. Independent dependence on Jesus is frowned upon, even important family matters. And then there's....

*Church renewal.* This mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not about reaching lost and condemned catholics. Oh no. It's all about church renewal. The Lord is about the business of restoring the church, His one and only true catholic church, to former glory. The Adders and Subtracters encourage renewed dedication to the mass and sacraments, and obedience to church hierarchy. And also....

*Claim your baptism.* Don't get baptized in water. That would definitely upset the priests, bishops and pope, the keepers of catholicism. Instead claim the legitimacy of your infant sprinkling. Accept that child baptism as a declaration of your renewed faith in Jesus Christ (and the one true church).

The prayer meetings became more structured as wednesdays rolled by. Prophecies were to be given by a select group, and anyone outside this bunch having a word from the Lord was to pass it to them for group discernment. In the beginning all were free to lead the prayer group into a song, but that freedom was long gone. Prayer ministry, after the prayer meeting, was limited to core group persons only. Teachings - there was a twenty minute teaching during the meeting - were likewise delivered by this small group within the group.

A spokesperson did not go into *The Book* to determine a message, or seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He drew from one of the book writers and presented his perspective. Father Jerry, immediately urged into the core group after his encounter with Christ, was invited to give many of the twenty minute teachings. Since this priest is so influential, let us now consider him further.

Though obvious to all Jerry had a radical change of behavior and personality, no one suggested this to be a born-again experience. Evangelicals are born-again; catholics are renewed. Conviviality had taken root in People of Charity soon after start-up, so Jerry's born-again experience was referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. No one dared suggest that Father Jerry had just become a christian.

However, in the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ, "the head of the church", Jerry is simply his newborn child. Not a priest, not a catholic, not a charismatic. At some future time Jerry may be called to minister to others. Meantime he must go through the same growth patterns as everyone. He must feed on the "pure milk of the word" and sit under Ephesians 4:11 ministry until Christ is formed in him.

He certainly ought not play the role of pastor or teacher. No leadership position whatsoever. He is not capable of giving spiritual direction and counsel. Only the naive would suggest that fervent prayer would cause Jesus to join them in their compromise and zap Jerry from on high with special powers that would exempt him from normal, time-consuming maturity. That's not faith, that's presumption.

But a priest adds believability to the group and makes the nervous bishop, now able to give input through his underling, less nervous. So Jerry is given a place of prominence and, next to Harry, he is the chief spokesman. But what can Jerry teach? He certainly can't be expected to teach of spiritual matters not yet learned. He is, however, expert on the subject of catholicism. Thus People of Charity will be steeped in an unsavory blend of Bible and catholic tradition. Jerry will point them right back to where they come from - the sacraments, the confessional, the etceteras.

The core group works diligently to appease the bishop. You see, the bishop, not the priests, is the man. It is he who allows People of Charity to meet in the basement of St. Mary's and he can put a stop to it whenever. His compliance is paid for with more and more concessions. The core group

appoints his boy, Jerry, as an intermediary between them and him.

So now we are coming to the end of the cycle. Jesus is ignored and the words of others obeyed. The Holy Spirit is grieved, His welcome evaporated. And now the in-fighting begins. Christians minus the Holy Spirit will turn on each other. Contentions, competitiveness, secret agendas. The core group becomes divided, the conflict spreads throughout People of Charity, some up and leave the church, the bishop is alarmed and shuts it down.

*And great was its fall.*

Chapter Three

L E T T E R S

*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

It is so very obvious to me that Jesus would liken Terry and Sheri, Barry and Carrie, Gerry, Perry and Jerry to the foolish man "who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them". But that can change.

Please understand that though the names are fanciful, their stories are definitely representational. Each typifies many. Writing a letter to them is writing to those they represent. Most, be they attached to a traditional or evangelical church, could, upon serious and honest reflection, find similarity to at least one of the mentioned characters.

TERRY AND SHERI

Dear Terry and Sheri,

I greet you both in the precious, in the holy, in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said repeatedly, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" I have a word for you. Do you have "ears to hear"?

The end of the charismatic cycle does not have to be the end. The Lord of the harvest is also the Lord of a second chance (and third, and fourth, and.... ).

The enemy of your souls, after enticing you to build on the sand of traditions, after gleefully witnessing the wreckage of your 'house', would now brutalize you with condemnation.

Please hear me. My word to you, though straightforward, is not condemning but hopeful.

There has to be the ingredient of humility in your inner lives in order to regain that joyful place at rebirth. Humility will get you what you want to have and desperately need. Without it you will continue to decline. Just look at its antithesis - pride. Pride got the devil in a real mess, and subsequently all of us. Humility will reverse the curse of pride. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." You need grace. You need humility. Humility is a choice. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you." Humble yourselves, that's the key.

You must acknowledge your betrayal to Christ. You transgressed. Don't blame Barry and Carrie, Gerry, Harry or Jerry. "My grace is sufficient for you." The Holy Spirit is God's gift to His church, and He was always willing to lead you into all truth. But you chose to put your trust in another. "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord."

Humility leads to repentance. True, deep repentance before Christ will bring you back to dependence on the words of Christ, the Bible. You built on sand and your house fell. Now you must build again. This time you will be the "wise man who built his house upon the rock".

There is a time to run. Repeat: There is a time to run. Flee catholicism. Simply *leave*. Turn your back on the Revisers and Barterers and Appeasers, all those who have turned back to Egypt. Fear God, not man. Don't ask permission, don't seek advice, don't explain. Just get out of there. Like *now*.

Hopefully you won't make my mistake and rush into evangelicalism. The Lord Jesus Christ is your refuge and high tower and shield and strength and comfort - not evangelicalism. Fundamentalist denominations are rife with trappings, though their traditions not so malignant as those of catholicism. Within their fold are an abundance of Adders and Subtracters, many in leadership positions.

The hard truth is, evangelicals compromise. They also build, largely, on sand of traditions. Jesus is not Lord there, not the decision-maker. Man is.

You must know, my brother and sister in Christ, that the Holy Spirit is to be your governor, your decision-maker. He is God and God's gift to you. Submitting to His lordship is obeying Christ. Only He will lead into all truth.

*What church or group should we attach ourselves to?* James: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." *Should we teach our children the ways of the Lord or introduce them to sunday school?* "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." *Should we seek out a house church? Start our own?* "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God."

Inquire of the Lord, inquire of the Lord, inquire of the Lord. That's wisdom and that's loyalty.

Let your determination and passion be pursuing Christ. No matter where you are at spiritually, there is always more. More of Jesus, more of His Spirit, a finer relationship with the Father.

Prosperous, meaningful, fruitful christianity is a christianity of pursuit. Of relationally obtaining more of the Son of God, and still being unsatisfied. It is a life of hunger. It is choosing Him above all, certainly more than each other.

Be forewarned: Choosing Christ is choosing the hard way (think of the martyred apostles), choosing Christ means being ignored by the less passionate (your very presence will convict them), choosing Christ necessitates persecution ("all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"). Christ's obedience cost Him serious abuse. It was a rich relationship with the Father that brought Him to Calvary. And life for His followers will be hard. Do not seek a life of bliss. Bliss is in heaven. This is a war zone.

You must know that Jesus Himself is the pearl of great price. Knowing Him is worth far more than our all. Should He visit you, even for a moment, you would melt in His love-glory. He, Himself, is more than enough.

Terry and Sheri, I sincerely wish you a good life in Christ.

See you up there.

Larry

BARRYAND CARRIE

Dear Barry and Carrie,

Greetings, my brother and sister, in the matchless name of Jesus, the name above all names.

I am writing to tell you that your friends, Terry and Sheri, have passed through what I call the *charismatic cycle*, and they are now in trouble. As you know, they have decided to stay within catholicism in the hopes of being a light in the darkness of that religion. Before they were lukewarm in their religion; today they are fervent. They need help, and that is the purpose of this letter.

The charismatic cycle starts at the born-again experience whereby one from a traditional church suddenly comes in contact with our precious Jesus. A few, a very few, respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit and leave. Most, including Terry and Sheri, remain, this in part due to influence of pentecostal television spokesmen. The problem begins when the born-again catholic (or whoever) is confronted with discrepancies between the Bible and their church. This puts them in real turmoil as both Christ and church demand their loyalty. The end of the cycle for most, after months and years of anguish, is a decision to be faithful to their traditional church. Christ is of necessity deposed.

Barry and Carrie, your friends Terry and Sheri need intercessors. They need someone from the

outside appealing to their Father for mercy on their behalf. They won't pray for themselves for they are under a thick fog of deception. As you may know, with sin comes blindness. Terry and Sheri are blind to their need of repentance.

An intercessor can turn things around. Terry and Sheri will reap what they sow and they have sown some very bad seeds. But intercessors can positively and permanently affect the outcome of their lives. You are their friends, I assume your love runs deep, but....

Are you qualified?

We must be qualified to intercede for another. Bitterness, envy, and unforgiveness disqualifies, and I am sure you are not hindered by these. However, since you were instrumental in convincing Terry and Sheri to remain in their faith, this so very contrary to the Word, and therefore steering them away from obedience to Christ, perhaps this invalidates you as intercessors. Unless, of course, you repent.

I do come to you in a spirit of humility. I want you to see something very important, and pray you have "ears to hear". May I speak to you in a forthright manner? Please don't confuse straightforward with harsh.

Your advice to Terry and Sheri reveals a serious flaw in your christianity. One who is building his life on the sayings of Christ would never advise another to build on the sand of a substitute word. Said another way, advising another to build on sand is an indication you yourselves are building on sand.

It may surprise and even anger you to be told that just as surely as there is a charismatic cycle, there is likewise an *evangelical cycle*.

The two cycles have much in common. They both start with the new birth, they both end with Jesus removed from the throne of one's life, and the between times are infested with compromises as charismatics and evangelicals alike choose the easy path of the majority. In both camps herd mentality, not Jesus, rules.

Don't believe me?

I have been where you now are, and I know much about you. Regarding your donations, rather than seek the direction of the Holy Spirit you tithe ten percent of your combined income, even though there is not one biblical precedent of a christian tithing or taught to tithe. You could cause thousands (yes, thousands!) to discover Christ by simply investing in evangelism in third world countries, but choose instead to finance a building to house the lukewarm and pay salaries of pastors prostrate before their denominational bosses.

You call 'the man' *Pastor* Whoever for no other reason than everyone calls the man *Pastor* Whoever. Instead of preaching to each other, as the Bible instructs, you are content to sit under the ministry of a few and accept their limited expectation of what God expects of you as His son and daughter. You have no intention, or even desire, to fulfill the high calling of God on your life. Rarely do you speak

the name of Jesus.

Evangelicalism is choked with traditional teachings, and it is on that sandy foundation you have chosen to build. Tell me, Barry and Carrie, are you really prepared for the judgment seat of Christ? Have you been laying up treasures in heaven? Is your relationship with the Lord who saved you deep or shallow?

Don't misunderstand, I am not suggesting evangelicalism is at par with catholicism. Terry and Sheri would fare much better if attached to your local church. Your people are well aware your salvation is Christ and Christ alone. With Terry and Sheri, salvation is a fusion of Christ plus, plus, plus. I am simply suggesting, for your own betterment, that you examine the foundation on which you are building. Is it rock or sand, the sayings of Jesus the Christ or those of man?

To be effective intercessors for Terry and Sheri, you must acknowledge the folly of pointing them back to a religion you yourselves would never embrace or introduce to your children. Further, I would suggest you confess your mistake to Terry and Sheri, and humbly ask their forgiveness.

Thanks for listening.

Your brother in the Lord Jesus,

Larry

GERRY

Dear Gerry,

Greetings, my brother, in His worthy name.

Barrie and Carrie, a young pentecostal couple, are regular listeners to your morning television program. More than anyone else, it was you who swayed them to suggest to their friends, Terry and Sheri, to remain in their catholic church after their born-again experience. The purpose of this letter is to try to convince you that influencing people to remain in their traditional churches has catastrophic consequences.

I have been where Terry and Sheri now are. I have witnessed dozens pass through what I refer to as the *charismatic cycle*, whereby a newborn babe in Christ, after being confronted with clashes between his religion and biblical teachings, chooses loyalty to his familiar church rather than the Bible, returning to the yoke of bondage from which Jesus so recently set him free.

I think I understand the temptation to compromise Christ's admonition to "come out from among them and be separate": if catholics remain catholics, or at least pretend to, they will be in position to lead other catholics to Christ.

I am telling you it doesn't work.

Catholics who do come to Christ do so by a supernatural move of an extremely powerful and merciful God, not by a compromising strategy.

As an infant will be emaciated without proper nourishment, so the spiritually newborn. Your logic, and that of many international and local spokespersons, is contrary to Peter's admonition, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." I am sure you realize the catholic *word* to the infant christian is not "the word" Peter was referring to. The catholic word is not pure, but rather a mixture of the Bible and traditional doctrine, the latter the larger component. Adherents are not encouraged to embrace Calvary as payment for their salvation, but instead the wafer the priest somehow turns into the (supposedly) actual Jesus during the mass; the emphasis is the sacrifice of the mass, not the sacrifice of Calvary. Another big one, forgiveness of sins comes via a priest. I am sure you know many of the etceteras.

Your admiral passion to see the lost saved does not negate your responsibility to obey *The Book* in the slightest. When the Lord said, "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father", He was talking to you as certain as any christian. This is a simple command. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." Your influence is enormous. Your compromise before millions of viewers - for example, calling your guests *Father* - opened the floodgates, giving charismatic christians permission to add and subtract at whim. You have eased the pain of their disloyalty.

Terry and Sheri have placed their young twin children in catechism and they now know how to pray the rosary and the benefit of asking the "mother of God" to intercede for them "now and at the hour of our death". Why, one might ask, would believers such as Terry and Sheri send their little ones to a catholic to be taught spiritual matters? Please hear ("He who has ears to hear, let him hear.") my answer:

It is no more absurd for Terry and Sheri to send their children to an unregenerate teacher than it is for mature elders in the body of Christ to persuade their newborn brothers and sisters to return to their world of traditionalism to be taught by unregenerate priests. A parallel to this would be trained soldiers sending inexperienced adolescents to fight a deadly enemy in the enemy's homeland.

Terry and Sheri are under the same pressure to conform to the group as their evangelical counterparts. Peer pressure in both camps is huge. Terry and Sheri, like Barry and Carrie, want to fit in, be accepted, and the going price is cooperation. So they do what is expected and send their kids to catechism.

It is folly to think God plants His children incognito among unbelievers to radically transform the catholic system or to lead others out of the entrapment of tradition or for any other reason. The devil plants tares in wheat, but God does not plant wheat in tares. If you could see into the loyalty and intention of charismatic christians who have gone back you would realize, to your horror I am sure,

they are now more fervent in their catholic faith than before their recent conversion to Christ.

It is true many have a sincere desire to win others to Christ, but as they themselves become entangled in tradition the fervor for soul-winning diminishes, and rapidly so. And the Bible's concept of salvation becomes seriously blurred. Is salvation through Calvary's sacrifice of two thousand years ago or the receiving of the wafer at mass? What may start out as playacting at the beginning of the charismatic cycle - pretending to be catholic for the purpose of credibility - often ends in the new believer being converted, again, to the catholic way. Will the baby evangelists, in time, need again to be evangelized?

True, these born-again catholics are, at least in the beginning, a light for Christ, but equally true, they are a 'light' for catholicism. By their participation they publicly identify with the catholic system. Can you not see their involvement is their endorsement? They often are seduced into becoming their church's 'evangelists', preaching the sacraments as God's 'second truth' or 'different way', a path unenlightened fundamentalists would never appreciate.

Your television 'pulpit' magnifies you immensely. You are probably more aware than anyone that the person you are has little semblance to the person you appear to be, even if you are, as I assume you to be, far above average. You influence multitudes significantly. Your interviews with catholic priests leaves an impression you must know to be false. Calling the man *Father* is teaching catholics he is indeed a spiritual father to be respected, even though he may be a recent convert to Christ. And since this man is a 'father' because his catholic lords made him a 'father', the lords up the ecclesiastical ladder must be likewise honored as Christ's spokesmen.

Surely you can see that siding with the rock of Christ's words instead of the sand of religion would be most encouraging to the babe in Christ who will soon be forced to make a choice between the two. I think I know your argument to my logic: *How can traditionalists be won for Christ if everyone abandons their traditional church after they are saved?*

I think it fair to say that that is God's concern, not yours. We must never forget that Christ is present. We are never called to make decisions for Him. He rules through us via His Word and His Spirit. The King instructs us to call no man father, so we call no man father. Simple. "To obey is better than sacrifice." We need not understand His battle plan. Our responsibility begins and ends with obedience. His army on earth is strengthened by obedience, truth and integrity. It is weakened by disobedience and compromise.

Who are we to change God's battle plan, to give direction from our limited perspective, or for that matter, even draw conclusions or give suggestions? We fight the dark kingdom with God's chosen weapon, the sword of the Spirit, not man's carnal arsenal of negotiation and pacification and compromise. Our personal effectiveness is relative to our loyalty to the sword, the rock of His Word.

We are each like a valve or a tap. The degree the Holy Spirit can flow in power through our lives depends on the openness of that valve. Disobedience causes the valve to be turned, somewhat,

toward the *off* position, as does compromise, fear, unbelief and pride. Obedience, faith, humility, truth, and faithfulness cause the valve to open. All of us are somewhere between fully open and fully closed. Our individual usefulness depends entirely upon the lives we choose to live.

Sadly, christians have a tendency to go the "way that seems right to a man", to lean upon his own understanding. But God's ways are far above our ways. God's ways do not always "seem right to a man" - but they work. To live you must die, the last shall be first, give and you will receive - these trespass human logic. God's way of truth and integrity surpass man's methods of compromise and accommodation.

Surely you can see the church, throughout its history, has been seriously weakened because of christians' better ideas. It was a mighty army of Compromisers and Appeasers that seduced the early church to abandon the Word and attach itself to the sand of alternative sayings, thus ushering in the dark ages.

Having watched your program, I believe I *hear* what you do not say: *I have faith God will protect His own once they are adopted into His family. The Lord is sovereign and can do all things.* This seems to be the underlying reasoning for advocating youngsters in the Lord to remain in their traditional churches.

It must be said, God cannot do all things. Every christian can do what God cannot, and we do it regularly. God cannot break a promise; we can. God cannot compromise; we can. While we have a choice to either keep or break a commitment, God has no choice. Because He is who He is, He keeps His promises. Unlike us, He has no prerogative. He cannot violate His Word, His integrity, His holiness to accommodate our 'faith'. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is not an Accommodater who accommodates Accommodaters.

Faith must be understood and differentiated from presumption. Faith is trust, trust that God is who He says He is, trust that He knows what He is doing, trust He will do what He says He will do. We are to root ourselves in His changelessness, His purity, His intelligence, His supremacy, His Word.

Foolishness is believing God could disregard His own nature. Foolishness is believing God to be a changing God, that He would change His ways to accommodate varying situations. Foolishness is believing the Lord will safeguard the christian who practices the forbidden.

God is true. Truth is God. And truth is power. Truth, then, is a weapon, a spiritual weapon. God is all-powerful and He is all-true. Were He not all-true, He would not be all-powerful.

The church lacks power when it does not function in truth. If it never veered from truth, it too would be most powerful - in Christ. The Lord, being Himself all-true, would not and could not instruct a spokesman to speak or insinuate an untruth. Not for the sake of conviviality, or kindness, or tolerance, or love, or compassion, or to maintain one's credibility, or to pry open a door of opportunity.

Gerry, you know God hates lies. He punishes liars. Lies grind against His holy Self. Lies and deception belong in the camp of the enemy, not in the church. Christ never pretended or gave false impressions. He never compromised. For He is God.

Jesus Christ would never have been crucified had He been a conciliator. The world does not crucify, or even persecute, the conciliator for such they themselves are. Jesus was murdered because He refused to bend, to accommodate. Now let's talk about....

Love. It seems so apparent that love to the Compromiser is more than correct behavior toward others; it is also a doctrine to be used to substitute other doctrines when discretion is called for. There is no biblical precedent for calling a man *Father* or *Pastor* Whoever, but it would be considered unloving and divisive not to do so. Excellent time to insert the love doctrine: "Good day, Father Whoever."

*But,* you reason, *every denomination has its failures, its traditions, its 'hail Marys'. Who are we to cast judgment upon traditional religions?*

Yes, many so-called fundamental churches reek of tradition. Affiliates live in denial, somehow convincing themselves they are building on the rock. The obvious they cannot see. The Lord never intended a denomination to be the christian's standard. *The Book* is His standard. Only teachings derived from the Bible are valid. To consider oneself a denominational person is not only detrimental, limiting oneself to the understanding of that denomination, but an offense to the "head of the church".

However there is a vast difference between the church that strays from *The Book* and one refusing to accept the Bible as God's final authority, and instead claims *itself* to be that authority.

I am not suggesting you enter the subject of catholicism on your program. It may be wisdom to avoid that subject and simply preach the gospel message. I can understand that, in fairness, you must allow your guests to express opinions contrary to your own. So that you are not misunderstood, why not begin and end your program with a statement such as :

*We realize our viewing audience is comprised of most, if not all, religions and denominations. We state categorically it is not our intent to favor or condone any particular religion or denomination. We believe in the infallible teachings of the Bible and encourage people of all backgrounds to build their lives upon the words of the Bible as the Spirit of God enlightens. Faithfulness to the Bible, as one understands it, is faithfulness to Christ. Any content of this program that might indicate otherwise is unintentional.*

Gerry, please read and study again the words of Jesus as recorded in Mathew 18:6 and 7: *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin....*

Your brother in Him,

Larry

Chapter Four

MORE LETTERS

*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

The earth consists of two sorts, the wise and the foolish.

The church consists of two sorts, the wise and the foolish.

The foolish in the church were, ironically, once the wise man who, after hearing the words of Christ, made a rational decision to build on those words. But since their born-again entrance into the family they have regressed. Now when they read and hear His precious words they ignore them, choosing instead to place their devotion on men and the gospels they have invented.

Catholic Terry and Sheri, pentecostal Barry and Carrie, as well as televangelist Gerry are three examples of the foolish majority in the church. Prayer leader Harry and Father Jerry are two more. Dr. Perry is still in the world, in awful danger, totally lost.

*Those who have ears to hear, let him hear!*

HARRY

Dear Harry,

Greetings, my brother, in the name of the Lord Jesus.

You have been on a real adventure since that day you were nominated group leader of People of Charity prayer group. I am sure you have experienced many ecstatic moments as you witnessed first hand the Spirit of the Lord impact catholic lives by the dozens. *Awesome, incredible* and *unbelievable* are understatements to describe the visitation into your catholic community.

It was not long ago you first experienced the wooing of the Spirit in your own life, only a few years since you embraced the lordship of Jesus, since you were washed in the blood of the Lamb. I remember my own moment. It was indescribable.

How could one so young in the Lord carry the weight thrust upon you? You are constantly tugged from two opposite and opposing forces. Your church - priests and bishops and most laity - insist you

make decisions to satisfy the status quo. The pressure to compromise the gospel by which you were saved must be intense and unrelenting. It has always been the nature of man to control man, the stronger subdues the weaker, and the weaker becomes subservient to his conquerer. As the middleman, you were seriously coerced to compromise the Word of our precious Lord.

But, conversely, Christ doesn't conquer, doesn't coerce. He instructs, and once the instructions are understood He backs off. He gives us freedom to obey or disobey. Though the consequences of disobedience are immense and awful, He will not coerce.

Perhaps you have come to learn that as one cannot serve God and mammon, neither can one serve God and man. I hope it is obvious by now you chose the wrong master.

Harry, I am here to tell you it's not over. There is an abundant life before you if you but choose it. Jesus said to His twelve and to You and I, "Abide in Me and I in you." He was talking about relationship. The invitation is not rescinded by our failures. Jesus is calling you into a deep and permanent and fruitful relationship with Him.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Jesus is actually extending to you an invitation of friendship. On His terms. No more compromise. No appeasing man. No longer prostrate before the gods of catholicism.

You once came, in repentance, to Christ for new life; now come again, in repentance, into the fellowship you had at rebirth. Humble yourself. Confess your unfaithfulness. Ask for, and receive, His forgiveness. Enter into intimacy.

And.... brace yourself for persecution.

The moment you refuse to be the pawn you were is the moment they will turn on you. Nice, congenial, loving Harry will immediately become poor, confused, selfish Harry. You will be the enemy, blamed for the division sure to come. You will be uprooted, and your departure cheered. The troublemaker is gone.

You will learn the simple, terrible truth: they don't want Him. Those who don't want Him are not victims of misunderstanding. They don't want Him because they have chosen another lord, be it themselves or others or a religious system. "He came to His own and His own did not receive Him." Conciliation will not cause them to adjust their fixed wills.

Harry, I wish you well. Again I say, a decision for Christ will bring, along with persecution, much success in every aspect of your life. And that of your family.

Your brother in Him,

Larry

DR. PERRY

Dear Dr. Perry,

My name is Larry Jones, I am a christian, an ex-catholic, and I have something of urgency to relate to you. I come to you in a true state of humility, not bearing an ounce of criticism but instead a weighty concern for your eternal future and that of your family. Please hear me.

First, however, I would like to commend you for the advice you gave to Sheri, advocating she and Terry make a firm decision one way or the other regarding her institutional church and People of Charity prayer group. Many thousands in the catholic charismatic movement throughout North America and beyond can relate with her inner anguish. You realized rightly her indecision to leave or stay, to give allegiance to the Bible or her traditional church, was the chief cause of her turmoil so detrimental to her health.

And now I would like to speak of the crucial matter of your salvation. At this time in your life you are not saved from the consequences of your sin, nor convinced of a need to be. Because I was where you now are, and you never were where I now am, I have an advantage of perspective. Jesus often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Do you, Dr. Perry, have ears to hear?

When I lived where you lived - that is, in the spiritual sphere where you still are - I was totally dissatisfied. Peering into the lives of others - family, relatives, acquaintances, as well as actors and sport heroes and religious folk - was thoroughly depressing. I knew what the richest and smartest and most favored possessed would never satisfy me. I could see the riches of some - financial, educational, social - and my relative poverty made no measurable difference to one's well-being. There was nothing worth striving for.

Looking back, I realize the cause of my unrest was my propensity to think. The axiom, "Ignorance is bliss" is not without truth. Had I just stopped considering, I could have squeezed some enjoyment from my toys. I could have become a movie/television freak. Perhaps a successful money-making machine. An employer with numerous, nervous underlings eager to cater to me. But oh no, I had to look around and consider and.... think.

I am sure your experience with people has taught you that people, generally, are inconsiderate, this not in the sense of unfeeling for the welfare of others, but simply non-considerate of.... *What makes the world spin?, What's it all about?, What is the end result of where I am going?*

I don't think you are inconsiderate. And I can't imagine that you are satisfied with where you are, that what was hollow to me satisfies you. This letter points to a better way.

I have a story to tell, Dr. Perry, a story that has brought me, and my wife, into a world - a much finer world - than the one you are now in. There is room for you and yours in this very real spiritual kingdom where Christ is king, my present dwelling place. Please *hear* my testimony.

When Linda and I came together at the marriage altar we were young and gullible. We would have both been startled if we could have peered inside each other to see the real person to whom we were about to vow to share the rest of our lives.

Lin's white train was not the only thing dragging behind her wedding dress. Trailing her wherever she went was a cumbersome collection of fears and failures, guilt and loneliness, heartaches and frustrations - a twenty-year accumulation since her conception.

And I was a fake. Being less than real was something I was and did. This talent to appear to be something I was not is common, I believe, to most. Image is all, reality not to be regarded. I wanted to appear to be capable, unafraid, unassuming, though I was none of these. I was a vacuum. A few days past the vows, in the privacy matrimony affords, I would begin extracting from Lin respect, honor, love and obedience. My intent was to receive, not give. Unfortunately Lin, like myself, had little to pour out. I think we were both in survival mode, just wanting to get through life.

Lin's rejection began when she was discovered. Her mother had already given birth to four unwanted babies and simply gave them to the government. But not even the government would accept another child from her. Lin spent the earliest days of life as a reject - unloved, untouched, neglected. Five months passed before she was given to the first stranger who asked for her - no interview, no questions asked. Fortunately this lady and her husband were generous with their time and adulation, and the sickly baby revived. Lin would not have to bear the memory of those early tragic months, but the bruises would remain and were much a part of the young lady I married.

I was eighth of nine children. Back then nine children wasn't an awesome accomplishment for a catholic couple, but not bad. I was born into a family strained financially and emotionally, and into a house already bulging. The news of my expectancy brought little enthusiasm. Pregnancies and births brought sickness and work to an overburdened mother, and more stress to provider dad. Had my younger brother never come along my life could have been more rewarding. He was always the baby of the family and I merely one of the in-betweens.

On the other side of the country, a few years later, Lin's security with her adopted parents was being threatened by the same government that refused her as an infant. Their house did not have an inside toilet and her dad's income was minimal, making them unqualified to adopt. Her mother, the one every considered her mother, felt compelled to share with Lin the possibility of her being taken from them. A full year passed before adoption papers were finally signed and every day of that year the young girl lived under the threat of being whisked away. Seeing an unfamiliar car on her return from school, Lin would remain outside until the stranger left. Nighttime was dread time.

My first day at school was a nightmare, as were many others. I was simply incapable of coping with responsibilities or pressures. Many days I cried, the only one of a large class to do so, bringing public shame. My teacher, a catholic nun, had no patience or welcome for me. My teeth became protruded as I tried in vain to suck security from two fingers. School life was a misery and home life wasn't

much better. I never competed for approval, but accepted defeat at an early age.

In second grade I was being prepared for first confession, a prelude to first communion. I know, Dr. Perry, you've been there, done that. Being older, my experience may be different than yours. We were instructed it was pardonable to forget to mention a venial (minor) sin, but intentionally omitting a mortal (serious) sin brought serious consequences. That is a *sacrilege.*

Venial sins were likened to little black marks on our white souls, wiped away by the sacrament of confession whether confessed or not. Mortal sins were big black marks that would assure an ushering into hell if 'caught dead' with one. All mortal sins are equal, except of course the sin of sacrilege. That was the biggy, to be avoided at all cost. A sacrilege is participating in a sacrament while in mortal sin. It brought a reserved furor from a holy God.

I was an overly scrupulous lad, and after confession I simply didn't know if my soul had been cleansed or that horrible sin of sacrilege had been stamped on it. There was no way off the course toward first communion which, if received in this condition, might bring upon me a second sin of sacrilege. In those days confession and communion were frequent, and every time I partook of a sacrament I imagined myself entering deeper and deeper into God's wrath. If I was killed by a car I would be in eternal damnation in less than a minute. I never walked close to curbs.

When Lin was ten, she spent boxing day at a small neighboring mining community under the supervision of family friends, a young couple. She was given permission to try out her new skates at the local rink. Inside the dressing room with a friend, warming herself by the wood heater, some teen-age boys crudely broke the news that her house in Princeton had just burned down. Delighted by Lin's horror, they exaggerated the bad news, saying her dad had burned as well. Further, they described in gory detail the death of her mother and sister and brothers. Lin ran, in her skates, the full mile to the young couple's house.

The black cloud of shock and fear so enshrouded her mind that they could not convince her no one was hurt in the fire. She spent the night weeping the loss of her family. When her family arrived the next day it was as if they had been resurrected, so convinced was the ten-year old of their death. After touching them individually, the cloud lifted but not without leaving a permanent scar. In future years anxiety came quicker, solace slower.

Before this experience, Lin's dad broke his back in a head-on collision with a drunk driver. Now having lost almost everything in the fire, they entered fully into poverty. My wife-to-be not only suffered the stigma that poverty and second-hand clothes bring, but her source of approval was drying up as father's spirit became as broken as his back, and mother became more demanding of Lin's help. Increasingly Lin felt the weight of eldest child. She fantasized a husband who would take her into a better world, someone vigorous and able and understanding. Unfortunately, he never came.

I ended my high school years a failure, having the lowest marks of all four grade twelve classes, the

second from the bottom far above me. Teachers for the most part left me alone. I was bored, I was lonely, I was afraid, and spent many hours in unnecessary sleep. At nineteen, with no accomplishments or awards behind me, a few dollars in my pocket, I walked to the highway to hitchhike to a new life - somewhere, anywhere.

Marriage was a contest to see who could get the most out of the other. Only a continuous supply of adulation from my partner could offset my failures and emptiness. And Lin was in no better shape. We were both vacuums, trying to suck life from each other. This is how we hobbled through marriage.

I was totally unprepared for my new role as husband and, soon after, father. Getting through life was hard. And so I began to look around. What's it all about? I searched for reality in a society that seemed to be plastic and shallow. My catholic faith gave me nothing. I searched within for authenticity and value, but found none. Just lots of self - self-concern, self-importance. I brooded. I stared into the clouds, wondering, wondering. What's it all about? Is there really a God? I became desperate in my search for.... something. What is true? What is good? What is worthwhile?

So that, Dr. Perry, is the world I came from.

In February, 1972 I discovered there was a new life, the life that I am pointing you toward. I will now tell of how I found and entered this new life that Jesus so bountifully supplied for every man, woman and child.

It started with hunger for truth and reality. I prayed to God, who I wasn't sure was there, to show me the way if there really was a way. I was at mass, another boring mass, when the Holy Spirit came upon me, a rare happening indeed. Tears leaked out of my eyes as I stared transfixed at the crucifix behind the altar at the front of the church. The Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, "Don't you get it?" I answered, "No, God, I don't get it." You see, I was staring at the answer - Christ, hanging on the cross. The Holy Spirit repeated, perhaps four or five times, the same question, "Don't you get it?" And my reply was the same, "No, God, I don't get it."

Shortly after, the Holy Spirit told me a certain nun had what I was searching for. Later, when with a group from my church, this sister in black handed me a tract - *The Four Spiritual Laws,* produced by Campus Crusade - with these astounding words, "The Holy Spirit told me to give this to Larry." Wow!

I was filled with expectation reading that tract, but was sorely disappointed because all it talked about was Jesus. Like you, I had heard about Jesus throughout my life. This was nothing new! Obviously God was toying with my emotions, and I struck back. I cursed Him, shook my fist toward heaven, and vowed to never repent.

The Holy Spirit again spoke to me, "Give Jesus a chance. Give Jesus a chance." Okay, I thought, I am at the lowest place of my life, what have I got to lose?

So I received Christ. I just *received* Him. In prayer, I mean. And that's when it happened. I became

different. Something real, something surprising occurred. I actually became a different person than the one I was. Yes, I looked the same, and sounded the same, yet I knew I had entered a different realm. I had never heard the term *born-again,* but that best describes my experience - a new birth.

Dr. Perry, I testify to you that on that winter day many years ago I discovered the new life Jesus promises to those who will receive Him and His sacrifice at Calvary as payment for our sins. Bear with me as I try to relate the enormity of that 1972 happening.

I want you to use your imagination. Imagine John the baptist baptizing multitudes who made the trip into the scorching wilderness to hear him and be baptized in the Jordan River. Pharisees and sadducees - religious leaders and the hub of that religious society - also came to be baptized, but John refused them because they were hypocrites. The river was murky and warm. Most likely it was a hot and sunny day. John was dressed in camel hair with a leather belt, his hair well below his shoulders, a massive beard, skin dark from a life in the sun. And along comes Jesus.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him." John resisted but the Christ insisted. "Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold the heavens were open to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighted upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" Now hold it there.

This is the scenario: meek and humble men and women with their children on the bank of the Jordan. Not so meek and not so humble religious leaders dressed meticulously, scowling, very unhappy. Bearded and tough John standing before Jesus. Jesus, thirty years old, black hair and beard, dripping wet, waist-high in water. The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. The Father of Jesus, His presence experienced though unseen.

And now, in your imagination, take a brush and erase the people on the shoreline, including the religious leaders. Next remove John standing before Christ. What you now have are three persons only, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - what is referred to as the Trinity. This is a unique manifestation of the fullness of the Godhead. Holy, holy, holy. Three - eternal, omniscient, all-powerful, holy. Now hear me, Dr. Perry, as I try to relate to you the immensity of my 1972 experience.

Do you see Jesus standing in the Jordan? I *know* Him.

See the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove? I *know* Him.

And the Father of Jesus? I *know* Him. He is now *my* Father.

Yes, I know each of the Three. I know Them by experience. I *relate* to Them daily. I abide in Them and They abide in me.

Can you hear me, Dr. Perry?

I am in touch, on an ongoing basis, with the Lord Jesus, His Holy Spirit, and His Father. I have a

relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Of all the titles Jesus possesses, the most worthy is "Son of God". I, too, am a son of God. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God." This sonship is way beyond symbolic. It is actual. It is everlasting. I am actually God's heir, "joint heir(s) with Christ".

My world and yours are so.... very.... different. Mine is so.... much.... wealthier. But what I have you can have.

To have what I have you must do what I did. I humbled myself. I came to Jesus in prayer. I acknowledged my sins and repented. And I received Him. I received His Calvary cross as payment for my devious sins. I embraced His lordship over my life.

And then I was taken into a new life, the life Jesus came to give all. I became a saved person. I am no longer on my way to hell. Heaven awaits me and soon I will be home.

Dr. Perry, as the song states, "There is room at the cross for you." What I have you can have. It's free, it's awesome, it's everlasting.

Most respectfully,

Larry

FATHER JERRY

Dear Jerry,

I greet you, my brother in Christ, in the name of the Son of God.

I heartily congratulate you on your recent entry into the family of God. You are my blood-washed brother. We are joint heirs to all God's possessions. We are each "the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus." Our names have been added to the book of life, heaven awaits us, how very blessed we are.

I think I know the awkward position you are in, and the forces grinding against your initial commitment to Jesus Christ and the words He has given us. I, too, had been thoroughly immersed in catholicism, attended a catholic grade school and a catholic high school. I remember as a youngster gathering with my family in our living room praying the rosary. Being a priest, I am sure your immersion goes much deeper than mine.

When I became His I knew immediately the Bible and catholicism were two opposing thoughts, though each contained bits and pieces of the other. Some catholic charismatics prefer to believe the two are congenial regardless of the evidence to the contrary. Most eventually choose the authority of their church over that of the Bible.

I was fortunate to have outside influences. Their maturity and love for Jesus were obvious proof

catholicism was not a requirement to maintain a depth in Christ. I came to see, however, the peer pressure upon evangelicals to conform to evangelical traditions is as weighty as the pressure upon catholic charismatics to adopt catholic traditions. I suppose peer pressure is everywhere.

Peer pressure is criminal. Jesus never coerced anyone to conform to His will, though that will was inviolable and entirely beneficial. If God honors the free will He has given, should we do otherwise? But herd mentality is a trait of the human race. Agree or go. Conform or face the wrath of the group. A need to belong turns one's hearing to the *off* position. Words, even logical and profitable words, just don't penetrate.

Jerry, do you at this time in your new life have "ears to hear"?

I want to confirm to you what I know to be your deep suspicion: catholicism is not true. Anyone "born of the Spirit" has the "Spirit of truth" within. I believe you instantly knew, at the time of your rebirth, there was little familiarity between Christ and your old religion.

Very soon after discovering Christ, the "Spirit of truth" gave me an inner witness that the cigarette I was smoking no longer held a grip on me. The addiction was broken. I was free. But I didn't obey the leading of the Holy Spirit and continued to smoke, and as a result I, and my family, suffered bad consequences. I believe the Spirit likewise gave to both you and I an inner witness that catholicism no longer had a grip on our lives. The powerful religious addiction, years in the making, was broken. We were free. We just had to walk away. But we didn't.

Our hearts wanted the familiar life. Old friends and approval and familiar routine. But staying was disobedience to the prompting of the Spirit, which was disobedience to Christ. This unfaithfulness to Christ caused us to distance ourselves, somewhat, from Jesus. We lost, somewhat, His protection and guidance. From there it's been a gradual downward trend until we became a part of the large army of compromisers.

But you still have the Holy Spirit and you still have a love for truth. If that love for truth is greater than your love for your religion, you still have "ears to hear" my simple logic regarding the fallaciousness of catholicism.

Because the catholic church declares itself to be infallible in matters of doctrine, one only has to find *one* discrepancy between the Bible and the cc to prove that it is quite fallible. And there are many variances. For example....

Matthew 1:25 states that Joseph and Mary had sex after Jesus was born. That being so, the 'infallible' teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary is false. Which means the 'infallible' teaching of the infallibility of the cc is also false. Which means that other teachings are suspect.

One more example:

If the sacrifice of Calvary was to be the final sacrifice, sufficient for all people of all time - as the Bible

so clearly declares - the "sacrifice of the mass" is not only unnecessary but a very serious snub to the salvation Christ supplied two millenniums ago. After the "last supper" Jesus referred to the wine as "this fruit of the vine", not His blood. You know the apostles and many others became christians before the mass was invented. The old priesthood came to an end after Calvary. Our one and only priest is our High Priest, Jesus. As there is no need for the "sacrifice of the mass", there is no need for priests. In short, God does not consider catholic priests to be His priests.

Believing the cc to be the one true church of God because the cc says it is the one true church of God is childish. Actually, the burden to prove or disprove the cc should not be on you or anyone else. They owe you, and everyone, proof their claims are valid. Something more than, "Believe it because I said so." If you agree the mormon should require validation that the mormon church really is the one true church they claim it to be, and if you agree the Jehovah witness should expect his organization to provide strong evidence that it is God's only spokesman, as it so claims, then you also should be demanding proof of authenticity, yes, you more than most catholics because you are a priest perpetuating catholicism. To bring it to the simplest terms, if a man were to say to you, "I am Christ's only true representative", you might be expected to reply, "Oh? Prove it."

Catholicism, like every religion, is nothing but a very long story written by a continuum of imaginative religionists who had not discovered the Christ you and I were so blessed to have found. The story widened and got more perplexing as the centuries rolled by. Changes here, corrections there, add a chapter, remove a chapter - constant revisions until you have what you have today (which will be different a century from now).

Again, all this means nothing to he who loves his religion more than Him. Hopefully you still have "ears to hear".

Jerry, because you have been so steeped in catholicism - more than Terry and Sheri, more than Harry and yes me, Larry - your escape is more difficult. Had you left immediately after discovering Christ it would have been much simpler. And you would have influenced many others to abdicate the cc. But I assure you, Jesus will empower you to keep any quality choice you make. There is a time to run.

This letter brings you to a fork in the road. Continue the old way or embrace, once again, the Christ who saved you and His precious ways. Will you be the wise man who heard His sayings and made a heartfelt decision to build on those sayings?

I wish you well.

Larry

## Chapter Five

## THIS IS MY STORY

*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock :*

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

*Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:*

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.*

Judas Iscariot had more opportunity than most to hear the sayings of Christ. Where is Iscariot today? The high priest Caiaphas heard the sayings of Christ. Where is long beard now? Pilate heard the words of Jesus. Where is he? Where and how one lives his forever is a measure of his wisdom/foolishness during his moment on planet earth.

Storms do come, rain does descend, flood waters do rise, winds do blow, every house is tested. Your house, my house, his house, her house, their houses.

This chapter is a story of a house that survived many storms. It is my story. And it is a story of a house that did not survive the storm, a true account of People of Faith prayer community.

MY STORY

My story begins in the earliest years of the '70's.

Jesus Christ had been a stranger to me the first twenty-seven years of my life. Although I prayed to God and did christian deeds, and though baptized as an infant, and lived, somewhat, according to Christ's teachings, I had never known Him.

I was a believer, but not a born-again believer. I knew *about* Jesus, but there was no intimacy. Spiritually, I was a blind man. I could not see.

And then I could!

At the age of twenty-seven I was born of the Spirit of God. My spiritual awakening came suddenly, about six months before I first heard the word 'charismatic', about a year before the People of Faith prayer group was birthed in my St. Theresa parish.

I was an eyewitness to the spectacular beginning of the Holy Spirit visitation, and left shortly before

its demise after a confrontation with its leadership. I had opportunity to witness firsthand what many have never seen, a lavish outpouring of God that brought life to many faithful adherents of, what I perceived to be, a spiritually dead parish. How quickly my spiritual perspective changed.

The following is my mindset *previous* to my new life in Christ:

St. Theresa parish. One of three catholic communities in our small city, religious home to my family for almost ten years. The church steeple, white and aged and domineering, overlooks one of the busier streets. To many the old landmark is a comfort. It has always been there.

Sameness. Little doubt in my parish of fellow catholics that sameness was good. It was God who protected the monotony. Custom and ritual were never out-of-date. We knew in our bored, catholic hearts if we remained faithful to sameness we would remain in God's favor and be rescued from the everlasting atrocity awaiting the rebellious to the status quo.

God. God is big. And powerful. You just don't mess with God. Don't *ever* die with a mortal sin on your soul. Nothing seems to please Him.... except sameness. Though distant, He sees us from a long way off. He peers through roofs and walls and everything. Nothing escapes those penetrating eyes. He scares me.

Jesus. He's okay. I like Him. Never gets mad. Jesus died about two thousand years ago. The Romans killed Him, but He got resurrected and returned to heaven where He came from. He too can see us from a long way. But that's okay. Jesus is nice.

Mary. The blessed virgin Mary. Queen of heaven and mother of the church. Most think she's *really* nice. God may get mad at us, but Mary?.... never happens. Through select people throughout history she taught us to say the rosary and call on her when life down here got real tough. She also taught us she is the immaculate conception, that is, she, like Jesus, was conceived without original sin. But you know, personally, I'm not so sure about this Mary stuff....

The pope. The pope holds the petrine office.... which is the same office Jesus gave to Peter. Over the years the popes have taught us they are infallible in areas of doctrine, and it's very comforting to know that, while other religions are speculating, our pope is never mistaken. The pope is a direct spiritual descendant of Peter. It's true! There's a list somewhere. I once saw it when I was a kid. You see, Jesus wouldn't leave the church in chaos, so before He left for heaven He passed on His authority to Peter who, in turn, didn't want to leave us orphans so he passed on the authority to someone else, that someone else being the second pope, and that tradition of authority-passing got us our present pope. Thus there has always been someone to keep us from error.

Priests. Priests are the last link of a long chain of command, loyal to the church and hard workers. They do mass every morning, hear yucky sins in the confessional, baptize every new baby, bury the dead, attend all kinds of meetings, visit the sick, teach kids catechism. Priests have the power to forgive sins, change bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus and, if they can get

there fast enough, save the unfaithful dying from going to hell by given them the last rights. But there's a price to becoming a priest: no wife, no sex, no kids, and a very small paycheck. And I think it gets lonely in that rectory in th evenings. They can play golf though and things like that. They can have a few drinks and smoke all the cigarettes they want. I once considered becoming either a priest or a lawyer but since both require a ton of education, and since I have never had a propensity for learning, I found it easier to be a high school dropout.

Nuns. I've never met a lazy nun. Never met a nun I didn't liked. Never met one who smoked. Many of them no longer wear their habits, and sometimes I think that's okay, and other times I think the old days were better when you could spot a sister a block down the road. The sisters make the blah bearable. They are shy, they smile lots and complain little, a very tranquil bunch, true servants of the church.

Mass. Mass is sameness. Monday to sunday, it doesn't change much. But God apparently likes it that way, so say our infallible popes, so who am I to complain. The priests don't preach, not like your protestant bunch, they just speak. Can't ever accuse a priest of getting emotional. Sometimes I go to church every day for an entire month. Makes me feel I'm doing something worthwhile, and I know it pleases God. The focus of the mass is the eucharist - that's when the priest changes the wafers of bread and the wine into the body and blood of Jesus. I guess it's the protestant's equivalent to 'receiving Christ'. After mass is done Jesus is locked up in a small white tabernacle and stays there until the next mass.

Confession. Going to confession is as much fun as going to the dentist. But it feels good when the ordeal is over and that's what counts. Whenever I commit a really bad sin I wait for a visiting priest to come by because most of the local priests think I'm okay. People don't go to confession as often as they used to when lineups were ten and fifteen long. Bet the priests don't mind though. Listening to all those sins must be a pain.

The devil. Nobody talks about the devil, and I suppose that's because nobody believes he is real, or maybe they are too scared to talk about him.

Birth control. There was a day when a family with eight or ten kids wasn't considered large. Lately however, the numbers have been suspiciously dropping. Six. Five. Three! Birth control, other than the rhythm method, is forbidden. Or is it? Some bishops say yes, others say no. Some priests give their okay, others discourage it. Often the ladies have to shop around to find the right priest to give them permission to take the pill. Suddenly the ax fell: the infallible pope said no way and that's that. What to do? Catholics love the church but they love sex too, and there's no way they are going to have ten to fifteen kids. Yes, the ladies are in a real fix - can't take communion while taking the pill and if they don't receive communion, mass would be pointless and painful, and everyone would think they must have done something real bad. I suppose there's a lot of women secretly taking the pill and hurting in their conscience every time they receive communion.

Protestants. Now they're hard to figure. No pope, no mass, no sacraments, no statues, no rosary. Seems so empty. Their ministers get married and even have a couple of kids. Don't know how they get away with it. I suppose since they are deceived - they must be or they would be catholics - they aren't responsible. I mean if they don't know better who can blame them? They will probably make it to heaven if they live good lives and don't persecute my church.

Billy Graham. See him once in a while on the boob. I'm surprised protestants have so much money - those stadiums must cost a fortune to rent. The man is quite impressive, I must say, and I'm sure if he were a catholic he would be a very good priest and even a bishop by now. This guy gets to preach and travel and have a wife too. I gather by his sermons that if you're not a catholic you got to get saved.

The Bible. Nobody reads it much, not even the priests. I think most catholics would rather say the rosary. Protestants put too much emphasis on the Bible, and I suppose that's because it's all they have. Obviously they don't understand it or they wouldn't be divided into so many denominations.

CHANGE

Change. Who would have ever expected it? And yet here it was, all the way from Rome. Our beloved, boring, tiresome sameness, which seemed to be forever etched across the worldwide catholic landscape, was being seriously threatened. Blame it on an Italian pope, John XXIII. Rituals were modified or discontinued. People looked at each other and smiled and even shook hands - right in church! Laymen (yes, laymen!) read from the Bible. Visiting officials spoke about Jesus. The priests seemed to become reflective, genuine. Mass wasn't quite so boring and people even hung around afterward just to chat. Change didn't seem so bad. "It's God!" said one. "It's the Holy Spirit!" said another. Could it be? Does God consider sameness stale? Though suspicious, I was also hungry for.... something.

Hunger. It took up residence and wouldn't leave. Made me restless and dissatisfied and got me questioning. I instinctively knew only truth would satisfy this hunger. So my quest for truth began.

Truth. What is truth? An invisible, evasive abstract? A philosophy? Another religion, maybe? A moral code? Whatever it is, I had to have it. "It's Jesus!" the Campus Crusade tract said. "Jesus is truth!" Jesus?

Jesus. "The way, the truth and the life." Who would have guessed truth was a person?

Jesus. I bowed my knee and my heart and my life to Jesus.

Jesus. And then I received Him. I received the Son of God. In prayer. "Jesus, I receive you now."

New life. It just came. I was born again. The light went on in my very dark and dismal life. It was like a celebration going on inside me. Out of the old, into the new. Just like that.

Jesus revolutionized my life. I could no longer be satisfied with the catholic way. He lifted me unto higher, much higher, ground. And then He, through His Spirit, began to teach me.

Jesus knows the importance of understanding. He once explained to His twelve that the one who receives seed ("The word is the seed.") into fertile ground is the one who hears His word and understands that word. I spent many hours searching the New Testament and reading a few precious books until I had a good comprehension what it meant to be born of the Holy Spirit, to be an adopted child of God, to be a citizen of His kingdom. I could now see where I had come from (escaped) and I shuddered. I am convinced the teachings that became locked in my heart those early days kept me from losing my faith in and love for and attachment to the Lord Jesus. Understanding the salvation message prevents satan from stealing that salvation.

The catholic sister God used to point me to Christ sensed I was becoming distant from the church and tried to reason with me. I responded, "If something really did happen to me, what about the rest of them?" I challenged, looking toward the church building, referencing the many faithful attendees. It was an immense question and there was no answer. I found it hard to believe I had been lifted out of dead religion while so many had been left behind. I would have preferred to be mistaken, and the masses who depended on their church for salvation - through the sacraments, indulgences, Mary, absolution of the priests, the last rites, purgatory - were not really traveling a pointless and cruel path.

But to believe that was to deny what I knew Christ had accomplished in my heart and soul. I was lost and now I was no longer lost. I was outside and now fully inside. I was thoroughly insecure and now I was safe. I could only conclude that those who never experienced my amazing salvation were still lost, outside the family of God, thoroughly insecure, in need of salvation through Jesus Christ. I could not discern one person within my parish who had the Spirit of the Lord dwelling within. Seekers, yes. Believers, yes. Good people, certainly. Born-again, no.

To carry a burden for hundreds, and even millions, of catholics would crush any babe in Christ. Yet how could I forget the multitudes left behind? Eventually I came to the awareness that Christ was the commander of His army and I but a lowly private. It was not my place to carry the commander's burdens. Jesus once said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I cast this weight at His feet, and received once more His peace that passes understanding.

## MY FIRST DAYS

I was a particularly lonely christian in those early days. There was no one to relate with, to share the miracle of my new life. (It was to be three years before Linda received Christ.) Mass was a bore and I was growing suspicious about its relevance and authenticity. So I went to an evening service at a pentecostal church. By myself. I was nervous.

The pastor greeted me at the door and said, "God bless you!" over and over again, perhaps fifteen times. I was wary about anything or anyone non-catholic, but I had to admit saying "God bless you!" was okay. I tried to recall a time someone had said those words to me but could not. The singing and enthusiasm of those pentecostals was stirring. Near the end of the service I was overcome by the Holy Spirit, my first immersion in God's power. Strength gone, I leaned against the outside wall, only my eyes and ears would function. Had I not sat down I would have fallen to the floor. It was awesome.

Soon after I attended a prayer meeting at a neighboring pentecostal church. The pastor welcomed me into his shepherd heart and over the years became my friend. And the Lord gave me another friend, a young family man like myself, who had an uncommon affection for Jesus and hunger for the Word. A true elder and mentor, his influence on my life was colossal.

One day I made a startling discovery, a catholic charismatic prayer group in one of the downtown parishes. It was incredible! Dozens of people, mostly catholics, were stretching hands toward heaven as they unashamedly praised Jesus. Wow! Catholics just don't behave like that - singing in the Spirit, quoting Scripture, prophesying, speaking in tongues, and generally behaving more like pentecostals than pentecostals. Inspiring as it was, attaching myself to this group was one of several major mistakes I have made in my christianity, having the effect of postponing my departure from catholicism by four years.

The following wednesday the prayer group leader invited anyone interested in taking the "Life In The Spirit Seminar" a seven-part seminar leading to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Two of us responded. Moments before meeting with this leader, the Lord touched me. I can only call it a spiritual jolt. I suppose it was a warning. The fellow began to show us verses regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit. From there he explained the importance of the 'blessed virgin' Mary and expressed his frustration toward fundamentalists who could not understand how to "tie it all altogether". The Lord had touched me, however, and I left that encounter unscathed. That was the first of many times I witnessed a catholic charismatic try to fit the new wine into the ancient wineskin.

Pentecostals and catholics don't fuse, not for long. The pentecostals preached the Bible; protective, catholic clergy and laity preached catholicism. Rock versus sand. Which brought tension. Which led to confrontation. Which led to dismissal of non-catholics. Which grieved the Holy Spirit. Which brought a rapid cessation to the prayer group. A mountain of prayer could not revive it because prayer was not accompanied by repentance.

In less than two years the house had fallen. And great was its fall.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Shortly before the collapse of the downtown prayer group, another had been formed in our own St.

Theresa parish. Our God is a great God, a master builder, and I had the privilege of witnessing Him give birth to a vibrant christian community in the midst of a parish spiritually dormant. It was a spiritual community within a spiritual community. Soon christians throughout the city and beyond heard of the signs and wonders so prevalent in our People of Faith prayer group. Crowds of well over a hundred were common as catholics continued to come, to hear, and to be converted to the Lord Jesus. Many experienced deep inner healing and miraculous physical healings. Deliverances from strangleholds from the world of darkness were frequent. Sins of unforgiveness and bitterness were dealt with by the Holy Spirit, using babes in Christ to minister to babes in Christ.

Never had I witnessed such a spirit of brotherhood, of compassion, of sincere concern for others. Small clusters gathered in homes sharing and praying by the hour. So much excitement, so many happenings. The highlight of the week was the thursday evening prayer meeting in the basement of St. Theresa. No shortage of guitarists and talented vocalists to lead the gathering in serious praise and worship unto Jesus. There was a real hunger for God in those catholic hearts and we praised Him brazenly. The session of praise and teaching and sharing over, most lingered to coffee and visit and chatter. It was also a time of ministry, the laying on of hands, the exercising of gifts poured out so generously by the Holy Spirit.

Over the next few years many dozens made decisions for Christ, many were healed of various ailments, marriages were restored. By all appearances People of Faith was a complete success, and some were prophesying continued growth. Unfortunately those prophecies were never fulfilled.

AND THE WINDS BLEW

Had someone dug below the surface to inspect the foundation of the People of Faith 'house', he would have found sand. Sand will wash away in a major storm, and the house foolishly built upon it will collapse. So warned our precious Jesus.

At the very beginning a decision was made to keep the prayer group catholic, no pentecostals allowed into leadership, thus occasions for conflict, as in the downtown prayer group, were minimized. Leadership, then, consisted entirely of those only a few years old in the Lord, none of whom had more than a meager understanding of Scripture, none who gave Scripture rightful esteem.

The bishop and the priests were mainly concerned with one question: *Whose side are they on?*

Leadership, throughout catholic charismatic circles called *the core group*, did much to assure the nervous clergy of their loyalty to the cc, eventually making a decision to obey the bishop in all matters. How could the Holy Spirit not be grieved by the group that covenants loyalty to a religious system rather than the true head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ? Yet God is love and love is patient and the Holy Spirit endures the incapacity of the young. Kids make mistakes, often and

various.

And this is a good time to state that this writer has no denunciation whatsoever toward these young and naive decision-makers. A carpenter friend who worked gratis on a project with unexperienced christian helpers lamented that when there was a right way and a wrong way to do a simple job they always chose the wrong way. Likewise, it seems, christians building whatever - a church, a house church, a ministry - do it wrong most times. Rare, not common, is the one or the group who choose to build on the rock of Christ's sayings. Though God's grace is always sufficient, almost always christians bend to peer pressure. When approaching a fork in the road a group or a church consider the matter, scratch their heads, say a prayer, hold a meeting, discuss their options, and.... invariably choose the wrong way. That's not cynicism, but an observation many years in the making; evidence surrounds us all.

Was it not so with the twelve? Jesus is making His last entry into Jerusalem after telling the apostles of His imminent betrayal and death. And what are the apostles doing? They are disputing about who will be first in the kingdom! Of the twelve, one betrays Him, one denies knowing Him, no one stands with Him when the bad guys come. None seem to comprehend His assurance that He would rise three days after His crucifixion - they were amazed at the report of the empty tomb. I mean, duh! After the ascension of Christ, after the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the upper room, apostles still sometimes behaved like the dumb sheep most of us are. Paul severely reprimanded Peter "before them all" for his betrayal to the gospel and gentile converts (Galatians, chapter 2). The apostle Barnabas bowed to peer pressure and joined others in their hypocrisy. The New Testament and early church history are loaded with examples of our venerable brothers and sisters making dumb choices, building their houses on sand.

Though lacking in wisdom, there was an uncommon love flow and a fresh sincerity in the People of Faith core group. Unfortunately, the charitable and sincere man who builds on sand, like the devious builder, will one day witness the collapse of his beautiful house.

In this charismatic community, as in most, there was an abundance of gifts of the Holy Spirit. But true to what one would expect, these gifts in the possession of youngsters in the Lord were much misused. Instead of checking *The Book* to come to a conclusion, they often relied on group discernment, or prophecy, or practicality. Or what would be the most loving thing to do. Or what would please the bishop. It's like Matthew 7:24-27 never existed.

At times, prophecies regarding Mary, "the queen of heaven" came forth. People were never encouraged to give public testimony to their conversion experience by being baptized in water; some were baptized incognito, not wanting the bishop to find out. A few in the core group still clung to the rosary, and this was acceptable to the others. Speakers at a special weekend conference were all priests with one exception, that exception being a nun.

The parish is a huge harvest field and many charismatics looked upon it with hungry eyes of an

evangelist. Credibility was essential, they reasoned, and much effort and compromise was invested in maintaining that credibility. Thus charismatics became ideal catholics, attending mass regularly, giving generously to the collection plate, assisting the priest serving mass, and, in general, being quite congenial and never confrontational.

The People of Faith community was making many of the same mistakes as the previously mentioned prayer group (and thousands of others throughout North America), but because leadership was carefully chosen and basically of one mind, and because decisions were compliant to the bishop, serious dissensions and confrontations were avoided. But Jesus did say there would be a storm....

CONFRONTATION WITH FRIENDS

One Sunday morning at mass the Lord spoke to me: "This is the last mass you will attend." Just like that. It was an ever-so-gentle voice, audible only to myself, so mellow it was hard to determine if He was giving me an order or simply stating a fact. Moments like this are rare in my christianity, and I remember it well. This is the full conversation I had with the Lord that morning:

The Lord: This is the last mass you will attend.
Me: Are You saying this is the last mass I will attend?
The Lord: This is the last mass you will attend.
Me: Are You *saying* this is the *last* mass I will ever attend?
The Lord: This is the last mass you will attend.
Me: Do You mean to tell me.... that this is the *last* mass I will *ever* attend?
The Lord: This is the last mass you will attend.
Me: Do You mean to tell me.... that this..... is the very last mass.... I will *ever* attend?
The Lord: This is the last mass you will attend.

I left with my two children before mass was over, yet I was still not fully convinced that this was to be the last mass I would ever participate in. (I mean, duh!)

Previous to this sunday morning I was dangerously close to completing my own charismatic cycle. It is difficult to understand the charismatic cycle but I have seen it played out many times. It begins with frivolous and innocent excitement, a result of a genuine commitment to Christ. Slowly that commitment transfers from Christ to christians, the body of believers one is attached to. If that community of believers is, in turn, committed to a church, it is at the feet of that church that one's commitment and loyalty will eventually rest. This is adultery and idolatry. The cycle is complete, the house has fallen.

I was advantaged over most. I had not received Christ through the charismatic movement and was not entirely dependent on it for teaching and direction. I had outside influences from whom I

assimilated a healthy respect for *The Book* and occasionally attended a Bible study at a local pentecostal assembly. I understood salvation whereas many of those born of the Spirit did not comprehend their own experience.  Possibly the most significant advantage was not being invited into leadership - which would have intensified the pressure to conform. I suppose I wasn't accepted because I never compromised as much as most, never proclaimed loyalty to the cc, didn't call the priests *Father*, didn't genuflect before the tabernacle, and it was common knowledge I sometimes attended a pentecostal church. I could have been considered a maverick.

All this, however, did not negate the tremendous pressure, peer pressure, to conform. Others seemed to have no problem harmonizing their new life with the catholic way, and the fruit of the Spirit was often evident in their lives. Generally, there was a willingness to pour out their lives for the well-being of others. And there was the strong social bond.

Social bonding keeps catholics catholic, baptists baptist, mormons mormon, atheists atheist. And catholic charismatics catholic charismatics. Lin and I were closely knit to several couples in the People of Faith community. It's hard to disagree with those you love. It became increasingly easy to reason from the charismatic perspective. I made the common miscalculation that God's gifts, and there were plenty of gifts poured out in the community, were His endorsement of the people to whom they were bestowed. God would only give gifts to mature, responsible and loyal children, right?

And then, curiously, there was pressure from evangelicalism to stay within the cc rather than leave. A jesuit priest, elevated by televangelists, made the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship circuit across Canada, speaking against the folly of christians leaving their tradition-based churches, thus offending those high up the ecclesiastical ladder, thus creating havoc. I brought my burden to a pentecostal minister.... who strongly hinted I should stay where I was. The aura of compromise was in the air and many were inhaling deeply. I knew it was impossible to fellowship with catholicism and obey Scripture at the same time, but what was my opinion against those who had been christians much longer than me? I was in a dilemma and suffered much inner turmoil. I felt unclean. I was a covenant breaker, a disobedient son, and my spirit hurt.

With sadness I witnessed the dramatic performance of the charismatic cycle conducted in the lives of many. With the eyes of the Spirit I could detect loyalty being shifted from God to religious men. And I could see the childlike innocence and joy being replaced by artificiality and impatience. "Praise the Lord!" was not proclaimed so often, the name of Christ no longer prevalent. New words and expressions - *headship, submission, the richness of the church, submission to authority, the sacraments* - became politically accepted speech. Mass was introduced into some of the thursday night gatherings.

My older children had matured enough to be influenced by what they heard and seen. Were they also to be the price of accommodation and credibility? Was god tradition going to win their minds

and hearts so that Daddy might have opportunity to work in the catholic harvest field? Their trust in me was blind and unconditional. Where was I leading them?

At mass I watched them watching. Dumb is assuming they see as Dad sees. Real dumb is assuming they see as Dad sees even though everyone else in the church sees differently than Dad. Up front behind the altar was the man everyone called *Father* with a colorful garment draped over his body. Impressive. Must be real important. Looks so official as he he genuflects, and prays, and blesses the people, and reverently lifts the host above his head for all to see. Hey, there's Jesus in his hands. Sure, it only looks like a white wafer, but it's Jesus all right. It must be true.... everything must be true.... after all, Daddy brought me here!

Daddy brought me. Daddy brought me. Daddy brought me. The knife twisted over and over again at the thought of my betrayal to my own children. Daddy brought them to a sacrificial altar he knew to be false and empty. Daddy brought them to a religious system that was capturing the hearts of friends.

I didn't know what to do. If I just left I would upset a number of people including the People of Faith people. Lin leaned on them heavily. She recently committed her life to Jesus Christ and did not need a major upheaval in her life. "Father", I sincerely prayed, "I stand in Your presence, not knowing what to do. I believe I am where You want me to be. If You tell me to stay, I will stay. If You tell me to leave I will leave. Amen."

I attended a pentecostal evening service soon after. The preacher declared, "Confusion is mixing the things of the world with the Word of God!" And he repeated, "Confusion is mixing the things of the world with the Word of God!" Again and again, "Confusion is mixing the things of the world with the Word of God!" Looking back, I am sure the Lord spoke those words especially to me through that minister. I finally got it! The light went on! So that's why I am so confused and distressed. And that's why everyone in People of Faith is confused and distressed. They were trying to fuse tradition and the Bible. The false with the true. The familiar with the new. Insisting the religion of their heritage be blended with the Lord's ways.

How simple life was when considered from a scriptural perspective. How complex and burdensome when viewed from an alloy of the true and the not true.

What are "the things of the world"? Simple. The things of this world is everything not the Word. The things of the world is sand, an alternative to the rock of His Word. Simple. This revelation led me to this prayer: "Father, I have made a decision. From this moment I choose Your Word in my life above all teachings and traditions. I commit my life to the Bible. I will never again compromise. I invite the Holy Spirit to reveal those areas in my life that are contrary to Your Word, and I will correct them. I depend on Your grace to help me keep this decision I have made, and I ask for that grace in the name of Jesus. Amen!" And I signed the last page of the Bible, right under Revelation 22:21, as an affirmation to the Lord.

That prayer was revival to me. Confusion disappeared. Sins of compromise and accommodation were forgiven. I felt real good. That was perhaps my wisest decision as a christian. I guess I don't always do dumb; once in a while I actually do smart. I will spend much of my life convincing others to build on the rock of Christ's sayings.

Smart, like dumb, often leads into unpleasant complexities. Paul taught Timothy (and us), "All those who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." I have always paid for my decision to be obedient to the Word of God, and that effect has always dribbled down into my family.

The Holy Spirit immediately began to show me where my life was in conflict to His Word. First, I must be baptized in water. The Bible demanded it. But what about my 'credibility'? No matter, a few months later, about six years late, I was baptized at a local church. Now what about my children? Didn't they require baptism? So I baptized them, two in a pool, one in our bathtub. And didn't they need Bible teaching as much as me? I once had them in sunday school, and now reintroduced them. I refused to call the priest *Father.* When receiving communion I never declared the customary and affirming "Amen" in response to the priest's words, "The Body of Christ". But wasn't my presence at mass an endorsement of the mass?

2 Corinthians 6:14-17: *Do not be unevenly yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

All this led to the Lord speaking directly to me, "This is the last mass you will attend." Already some friends tried to discourage us from attending functions outside the church, suggesting if the bishop found out (I am sure he already knew) he would consider it a bad fruit of People of Faith and put restrictions on the entire prayer group. Lin and I discussed the possibility of leaving the cc and decided, if we did so, to inch ourselves out as discreetly as possible. But no, it didn't work that way.

The following weekend (after having that conversation with the Lord) I was out of town at a Full Gospel Business Men's gathering. In some ways they were much like People of Faith, heavy compromisers, steeped in the strange logic of appeasing the status quo of all churches. However a friend - a recent convert, a few years ago a pimp in Vancouver, not the most moderate fellow - did speak his mind: "The devil has you and your family right where he wants you, in the cc, and he doesn't want you leaving."

Returning home, Lin announced the decision she had made in my absence that weekend: "We will *not* leave the cc." Oh-oh.

*Would it be fair to the kids to bring such drastic change?,* she reasoned. *Perhaps catholicism wasn't so*

*bad after all. No one else seemed to have a problem, just you. Think of the damage our departure would create. Do we have the right to hurt our friends?*

The oh-oh led to panic. Before, I always thought the choice was mine. Lin had always bowed to my leadership, but now she was authoritative: "*We* will not leave the cc." Panic led to: "As of this moment we HAVE left the cc!!" My decision was final. The Lord was correct when He said, "This is the last mass you will attend." It was.

I shared my decision with a friend from People of Faith. He was, surprisingly, shattered. Lin occasionally cared for his children free of charge, but now they would no longer be in the same house as me. From him the news spread. I was baffled by the intensity of people's reaction. I heard that some wept, some gathered to pray that I would reconsider my decision, a priest led his parishioners in a statement of faith and a pledge to remain in the church, bishop and priests - whom I didn't personally know - discussed the calamity. What they feared most was happening, 'people' were leaving the church. I tried to prepare Lin for an unpleasant confrontation from the People of Faith leadership, but she refused to believe they would ever turn on us. A few days later the prayer group leader and his wife pulled into our driveway. Another oh-oh.

THE LEADER

The prayer leader is a young, very likable family man. That is, likable in a human sense - that is, by human standards - that is, more likable than most. We are all a bit daffy; sin has done that. At best we are in recovery from the effects of our rebellion and that of others. We do dumb regularly. Our regret list lengthens.

I really like this good man, his beauty of character runs deep, and had wished we could have been friends, could have had long walks and talks, argued about this and that, and really listened to each other. He was the leader of the core group which was the leadership of People of Faith. A sincere man with a shepherd's heart, carried a heavy anointing, gifted with gifts of the Holy Spirit.

He was very angry that sunday afternoon, not at Lin but me. He said he had always been suspicious of me and was now fully satisfied his discernment was correct. I think he meant that because I put myself and the welfare of my family above the prayer group, I was indeed the selfish person he thought I was. He felt I should have come to others for group discernment before making a decision I knew would effect so many.

Group discernment. That is how catholic charismatics were taught to govern their lives, individually and as a group. Don't make decisions on your own. Don't think you can find your answer in *The Book*. There is safety in numbers. Several can discern the will of God better than one. You see, there was a lot of books at that time directed at traditional charismatics - teachings on prayer, praise, discernment, prayer groups, community living, unity, submission to leadership, spiritual gifts....

everything. Writer to publisher to distributor to book store to core group to People of Faith.

I replied I knew beforehand what that group discernment would be. This good man asked if I trusted his discernment and I replied I did not. He expressed disappointment I did not share my decision with him personally before he learned it from another source. I said that because I had the conviction I was following what I believe to be a leading of the Lord, I owed no apology or explanation to any man. He asked me to watch the fruit of my decision to determine if it was the right one. I replied any bad fruit that may be forthcoming would not necessarily be because of bad judgment on my part.

He then stated that it was the opinion of the core group that my actions were detrimental to the prayer community, and if the core group did not retaliate in some way it would be a sign to the bishop they condoned my decision. Therefore they unanimously decided we were no longer to minister to people during or after the thursday gatherings. Also, I would not be asked to give teachings as I was rarely chosen to do.  I asked for an opportunity to contest that decision, and was assured it would be provided at my convenience. It was obvious during this encounter Lin was not on my side. The four of us prayed together, embraced, and said our good-byes. (Today, at the time of this rewrite, the prayer leader is in heaven, his gracious wife married to another, his precious children older than he at the time of this encounter.)

Lin was busted. She put her trust in man and man, for the sake of appeasement to man, had turned against her. We knew and loved every person in the core group, about fifteen, and they had apparently been unanimous in their decision to publicly discredit us. And it was all my fault. Had Lin not tried to reason with me, to warn me of the storm my decision would cause?

The pressure to back down was heavy. And yet through the confrontation and confusion and animosity I could see the real enemy trying to get me to relinquish my grip on the two-edged sword. But I had signed the last page of the Bible. I would not back down. "Father, I cannot bear this burden. I give it to You. It is no longer my fight. It is Your fight. No matter what happens I will be obedient to Your Word. Amen!"

Lin was the more susceptible and it was to her people directed unfavorable questions and comments, always when I was not there to protect her. (Bless their precious, well-intentioned hearts.) But all this did not have its intended effect. Their reaction to our leaving the cc exposed their hearts, and it became evident to Lin that love of church surpassed their love for God.

As mentioned, I requested and received permission to challenge the core group, something far from my pleasure and far from my temperament. I was scared, like big time scared. Yet I felt like a sent one, a messenger with a message from the Head of the church. They were going in the wrong direction and the Lord was giving an opportunity to change course. It was at their wednesday evening meeting that I met with leadership in the leader's home. One by one they embraced me in genuine affection. I don't do confrontation well, the most I could do was read from notes. Though this book is a rewrite, the rebuttal before the core group, in the next chapter, is almost word for

word.

Chapter Six

## AND GREAT WAS ITS FALL

*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.*

The prayer leader had reacted foolishly to my decision to leave the cc, bless his heart. His reproof had no Bible in it whatsoever. He was not the faithful ambassador of Christ, but rather a loyal deputy of the bishop. But his folly is the norm. Folly resides in most, awaiting opportunity to express itself. In his precarious position I would probably have likewise conceded to pressure applied by church, by charismatics, by outsiders. The unanimous decision to punish me is ample proof that not one in the core group had the temerity to insist on building People of Faith on the rock of Scripture.

And foolishness in the body of Christ extends far beyond the charismatic sector. There is an abundance of compromise, I was to discover, within evangelicalism. It is no more an offense to *The Book* to call a man *Father* than to call a man *Pastor*. I am convinced the predominate motive for tithing is no more noble than a need to be accepted; tithers are embraced, non-tithers are tolerated. The evangelical ecclesiastical structure has much in common with that of catholicism.

Building on sand is what most do, foolish is what we are. To fit in, to be approved, affirmed and endorsed are powerful motivators. I will build my house on sand if that's the price of acceptance to those who build their lives on sand. Rejection injures and scars, to be avoided at all cost.

### FACING THE CORE GROUP

My talk to the core group that wednesday evening so long ago lasted about twenty minutes. First I argued against the practice of depending on group discernment instead of the Bible whenever there was a decision to be made, expecting others to honor that discernment. Twentieth century pentecost proved the unreliability of group discernment. Many had been persecuted by their own church because they spoke in tongues and claimed to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. How many church councils and committees from all parts of North America and from every denomination have made collectively bad decisions in dealing with these 'offenders'? Often the majority prove to be wrong and inadvertently oppose the work of God. And then I said....

*"But" you may say, "These are hard sayings. How could satan deceive them and use them?" The answer is simple. Scripture says be* doers *of the Word.*

*James 1:22: But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

*No man has ever done the work of the devil by being a* doer *of the Word. The Lord has told us in His book to do many things - to pray for the sick, to give generously, to love the brethren, to pray unceasingly, to be open to the Spirit, to pray in the Spirit, to comfort the afflicted, to preach the holy gospel, etc., etc. But to my knowledge God does not say in His Word to prevent His Spirit from working where He will and through who He chooses.*

*1 Thess.5:19: Quench not the Spirit.*

*The people who quench the Spirit are not sons of the Father doing the Father's business, but sons preoccupied with doing* someone else's *business, serving another master.... saying things the Father did not tell them to say.... doing things the Father did not tell them to do.... saying and doing things contrary to His Word. As sons it is our business to do the Father's business. Anything else, to put it bluntly, is none of our business. I suggest that the common denominator to every quenching of the Spirit is a disobedience to, or misunderstanding of, or a disregard for His Word.*

*"But", it could be said, "The Father could speak through sources other than the Bible. He could speak through men, through visions, prophecies.... whatever."*

*Yes, God could speak through other channels - He could speak through a mule. But one thing God cannot do (not will not do but* cannot *do) is speak a message contrary to His Word. Again I say He cannot speak a Word that is contrary to the Bible. If He were to say one thing through His Word and something contrary through another source, then at least one occasion He lied. And God cannot lie. And Jesus said that a house divided against itself will fall.*

*No, the Father cannot say anything contrary to His Word. But His sons and His daughters can. And His sons and daughters do. Some occasionally, unknowingly, some flagrantly and defiantly, some with religious fervor. It is pathetically common to hear christians say: "I believe this" or "I believe that".... not standing on any authority but saying "I believe it because I believe it".... giving no source except one's own opinion. Not, "I believe Scripture teaches this or indicates that".... but a flagrant disregard for the Word.*

*And after the gospel of Jesus Christ has been watered down, diluted with worldly sayings and opinions, altered, neglected, ridiculed and compromised.... the result is a gospel* different *from the gospel that Jesus, Paul and Peter taught. Paul makes great effort to convince the Galatians that the gospel he preached to them was given to him by a revelation, and fourteen years later he compared that gospel with the one that the apostles of Jerusalem were teaching and found it to be the same.*

*Gal. 1:6,8,9: I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel.... but even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be*

*accursed.*

*As sons and daughters, we individually and collectively have to make sure that what comes forth out of our mouths is the same message that the Galatians received from Paul, that the gospel that we speak to our children and to our community and to our world is not a different gospel than that which the circumcised heard from Peter. Paul says that a man who preaches a different gospel should be accursed.*

*Are the people in our community hearing and speaking the same message that the Galatians received? Would Paul be able to compare the gospel revealed to him by Jesus Christ to our 'catholic charismatic' gospel and find them one and the same? I fear not. What they do hear and say are words such as these (or to this effect): "I am obedient to my church, even over the Bible." I say.... devil's lie! "I don't care what the Bible says, this is the way I'm going to do it and God will bless me for it." I say.... devil's lie! "I don't care what the Bible says, I am going to go on teaching this way because the fruit is good." I say.... devil's lie! "I don't care what the Bible says, I've prayed this way all of my life and I don't have to change now." I say.... a lie of satan!*

*When we are taught something it is our responsibility as sons and daughters to check to see if it lines up with the Father's Word. As His children, we should make a conscious effort to say only words that line up with His words. That's what a loyal son does. A loyal, committed son does not say words that are contrary to the Father, does he? Again, James 1:22: But prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

*It doesn't say be doers of your conscience. It doesn't say be doers of your good intentions. It doesn't say be doers of what someone else says to do. It doesn't say be doers of what seems to be right for the occasion. It says be doers of the Word. God calls us to obedience.*

*1 Peter 1:2: That you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.*

*Romans 16:19: For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you.*

*1 Samuel 15:22: Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.*

*Yes, God's call is a call to obedience. He doesn't need a compromiser, someone to water down His holy Word, or to add to it, or to take away from it, to make it more acceptable. He is not looking for good p.r. men. He doesn't need someone to prepare the way for His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit prepares the way for us. It's the Holy Spirit who is, at this very year, breaking through the Iron Curtain. It's a foregone conclusion that the Bamboo Curtain is next. If the Iron and Bamboo Curtains are no challenge to Him, the religious curtains that the churches have made to fortify themselves against Him are nothing.*

*He doesn't need you or I to break down the walls.... to negotiate.... to appease.... to compromise and to compromise and to compromise again.... in the name of order.... in the name of submission.... in the name of love. It is not our place to be in fear and trembling, like a mouse that is sleeping with an elephant, fearful and cautious that someone will offend the beast  and we, the powerless charismatic mice, will*

*get crushed should he decide to roll over.*

*God is not looking for faithful catholics in which to work through in the catholic church. He searches for faithful sons to work through in the catholic church. We are to keep our eyes* off *the giants,* off *the elephant,* off *the problems and focus on the Lord. What is happening in our community is not a 'catholic charismatic' movement, but God moving charismatically in the cc. What is happening in the anglican church is not an 'anglican charismatic' movement, but God working charismatically in that church. If the Holy Spirit were to move charismatically in my union, Local 213, I.B.E.W., immediately the title would go up - The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 213 Charismatic Prayer Movement. And many would conclude that God is wanting to do something* to *the union.*

*The point is that God does not want to do something* to *the churches - the institutional churches; He wants to do something to the people who happen to be there - He wants to save them! That's the burden on the Father's heart when He asked Jesus to die for mankind. That's the burden of His heart today. That's the burden of Jesus' heart.*

*John 3:16: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life.*

*2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is.... not wishing that any should perish but for all to come to repentance.*

*That's supposed to be accomplished through us. That's supposed to be the burden of our hearts, as sons of the Father, as brothers of Jesus. satan has ten thousand ways of distracting us from that purpose because he too is battling for those souls. And how does he do it? By getting us off of the Word - the two-edged sword. Not so much our defensive weapons - not our helmets, our breastplates, our shields, our footgear, but our offensive weapon - the two-edged sword. That's what satan fears the most.*

*Scripture says that Scripture is the 'power of God unto salvation.' (Romans 1:16) Take away the gospel and not one more soul will ever be saved. Not one. Watering it down is dulling its edges. Swearing allegiance to something else or someone else is not only a sin against God, but it takes the power out of the sword, the "power of God unto salvation".*

*I am not suggesting that we forget to be obedient to the emperor or submissive to each other, but Scripture teaches that those things are to be done only to the degree that it doesn't blemish our individual consecration to God - only as far as it doesn't cause us to be disobedient to God, our first love. We are not to limit our obedience to God by what another individual says or by what any church says. But we are to limit our obedience to man when it is conflicting with the Word of God.*

*1 John 5:3: For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.*

*Luke 16:13: No servant can love two masters.*

*Acts 5:29: But Peter and the apostles said "We must obey God rather than men."*

*Jeremiah 7:23: Obey my voice, and I will be your God.*

*Zechariah 6:15: Amend your ways, and obey the voice of the Lord.*

*Romans 6:16: Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves to obedience, you are slaves to the one who you obey?*

*2 Thess. 1:7,8: When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

*Again, 1 Samuel 15:22: To obey is better than sacrifice.*

*Again, James 1:22: Be doers of the Word.*

*Genesis 22:2,9,10,18: Take now thy son, thine only Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering.... and they came to the place which God had told them of; and Abraham built an altar there upon the wood and Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.... and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;* because thou hast obeyed my voice.

*Yes, our call is a call of obedience. And we have no right to interfere with each other, or apply any pressure upon each other in our quest to be obedient to the Lord.*

*Galatians 5:1: It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery.*

*I think Paul recognized that within the human make-up there is a tendency to go back to where we came from.... to go back to the country we came from.... to go back to the habits that we came from.... to go back to the religion that we came from.... to go back to the prison from which Jesus set us free.*

*1 Cor. 1:12,13: Each one of you is saying "I am of Paul" and "I of Apollos" and "I of Cephas" and "I of Christ".*

*I'll bet there wasn't one Corinthian who said, at the time of his rebirth - his conversion - "I am of Paul", "I of Apollos", "I of Cephas". But there is a mysterious and awful pulling to go back.*

*2 Peter 2:22: It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to his own vomit" and "a sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire".*

*Jesus comes to our prison and unlocks the prison door and sets us free. We rejoice for a while. But then a strange thing happens. Many.... most.... turn around and go back to the same prison.*

*1 Cor. 7:23: You have been bought for a price, do not become the slaves of men.*

*Paul said to the Galatians (1:10): If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.*

*Again, Galatians 5:1: Do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery.*

*My brothers and sisters, I challenge you in the name of Jesus. Can you stand before Him and say, "Jesus, I honestly believe that I have not returned to the yoke of slavery from which I came."? Can you say like Paul, "I am free from all men."? Can you say, "I am a doer of the Word of God."? "I am a bond-servant of Christ."?*

*Many in the charismatic movement have not only gone back to the religion from which they came, but insist that everybody else do the same. My spirit hears the Lord crying, "Look what they've done to My song!" You take people by the hand and lead them to Jesus, and Jesus, true to His word, sets them free and makes them sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Then you tap them on the shoulder and say, "Remember us?" "O yes, you're the ones who led us to Jesus." You then take them by the hand and lead them right back to the prison from where they came.... at one time under the pretense of them being a light* (in the cc). *But I think that this episode shows that what you really mean is, "Try to leave and you will have us to contend with." So there they sit, not only with your endorsement but upon your insistence.*

This is part, not all, of my message to the core group of People of Faith about thirty years ago. I think it hit my friends very hard. Until that day they had never been confronted with such rationale. No one had gotten to them with a Bible perspective. Probably no one tried. But this evening they were forced to hear, to listen to an opposing logic. I think my talk saddened them severely, their confidence in their direction weakened. Perhaps there is a comparative to the rich young ruler who walked away from Jesus sadly because he was unwilling to surrender his wealth, though the wealth of this group was not monetary. No, they were not about to surrender to my admonition to repent of disloyalty to the Bible, yet I knew the Lord's words would not return void, but find good ground in those unselfish hearts and some day bear fruit.

As I departed they embraced me once more, though I felt it was much more difficult this time. As they did so, an awareness came over me that I was no longer a part of People of Faith. It was over. "The Spirit bade me go." Almost five years of fellowship had come to an end. It was the cost of freedom.

This is a good time to say that this kind of tearing of fellowship, this awful breaking of relationship, is what one instinctively avoids, and there is a strong inclination to compromise in order to maintain social communion. Everyone connected to the one refusing to compromise pays a price - wife, children, relatives, spiritual associates. The one refusing to compromise to keep the unity becomes a marked man. Everything that goes wrong will be blamed on him, and forgiveness to such does not come easily. You think following Christ is painless? Undemanding? Serene? Think again. If our precious Jesus was a compromiser He would not have been crucified. Had Paul been a compromiser he would not have been martyred. John would not have been banished. Luther would not have been hounded. Martyrs would not have been burned at the stake.

Soon after a series of unfavorable happenings battered People of Faith. Serious differences of

opinion within the core led to equally serious resentments. One confrontation prompted the expelling of an influential and respected husband-wife couple. The bishop forbid people from praying in groups in their homes. Confusion and, much worse, unforgiveness blanketed the community. The prayer leader resigned, the expelled couple left the church, some left People of Faith in protest, many simply stayed home thursday evening, the numbers dwindled considerably. The Spirit had been quenched, and the mighty wind was now a breeze.

Then, months later, revival! The core group, under new leadership, bowed in repentance before God and asked forgiveness from the discharged couple. God honored their repentance and soon the wind (the Wind) was blowing again. And then, suddenly, another tempest. The bishop intervened, insisting all teachings conform to the cc which meant the gospel of Christ was to be totally replaced by a "different gospel", a foreign gospel, the Roman gospel, the gospel of salvation through the sacraments.

The core group refused this dictum, and informed the bishop and the prayer group that such a condition was intolerable. Before the core group had opportunity to resign from their position, the bishop dismissed them and threatened some the right to receive the sacraments, this considered a harsh penalty and public disgrace to any catholic. A priest took over leadership of People of Faith and moved the group to his own parish. As far as St. Theresa parish is concerned, the charismatic cycle is complete.

What happened to that parish happened in many locations. Prayer groups in traditional churches - those spiritual communities within spiritual communities - fell like dominoes. Sad.

## Chapter Seven

## T H E  R O C K

*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

What is "the rock"? The rock is "these sayings of Mine". The rock is all sayings of Christ. The rock is Christ's pronouncements, what He has said, His teachings, admonitions, corrections. The rock is His Word.

And the rock is the Father's words. Jesus spoke what He heard the Father say.

And the rock is the words of the Holy Spirit. The words of the Father, the Son, and the  Spirit are the same, not a pinch of difference. The Three are in agreement. There is no variance in Their language. Holiness speaks truth and truth is consistent and truth is oneness.

The body of Christ universal contends that *The Book* is the inerrant Word of God. The Bible is a collection of Scriptures written over a period of about fifteen hundred years. The Bible is a containment of many of the words of God.

The original writings of Scriptures are gone. Copies of the original writings are in abundance. Although copyists were dutiful in their duplication, there are minor variances between one lineage of copyists and another. The Dead Sea Scrolls are ample evidence our Bible maintained much accuracy throughout millenniums of copying, not perfect accuracy but near perfect. What is certain is the accuracy of conveyance of thought and teaching. The thoughts of God, those He wanted us to know, are sure. What He said He said more than once through more than one.

The one building on the sayings of Christ is building on the sayings of His Father and is building on the sayings of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is building one's life on the Bible.

The Bible is about Jesus, mostly. It is certainly also about the Father and the Holy Spirit, and about villains and heroes of the faith, and about angels and the devil and demons, and about heaven and hell, but mostly the Bible focuses on Jesus. That's the way the Father and the Holy Spirit intended it to be.

The Bible is a story of salvation. God's man sinned and needed to be rescued from the awful penalty attached to sin, and the Bible reveals God's plan of salvation. God the Son had to become a man to be able to save mankind. A sacrifice was required, a pure and sinless sacrifice. Since no beast or man or woman qualified, God became a man so that as a man a satisfactory payment for sin could be made. As all men, the man Jesus entered the human race as a single cell, this holy cell implanted in the womb of a virgin. Jesus eventually evolved into a spotless sacrifice and thus a savior to those choosing to be rescued.

The wise man, then, is the one building his/her life on *The Book.* That is why it is so very foolish to give the Bible less consideration than other writings. Building on Christ's words are building on Christ. Saying *Amen!* to Bible verses is saying *Amen!* to God.

The Bible Christ is different from the catholic Christ (or should that be christ?) and the Jehovah's witness Christ (or should that be christ?) and the mormon Christ (or should that be...?) and the atheist Christ, though they all have some similarities. The Bible Christ is the true Christ, true in every aspect. When a charismatic christian completes the charismatic cycle (and when the evangelical completes the evangelical cycle) he often chooses the Christ tradition has invented, and it is this less-than-true, less-than-real Christ he will worship. It is always safe and wise to address and worship the one, true Christ because there is only one one, true Christ. ("Father, I ask in the name of the one, true Christ....") How important to know the Christ of the Bible. And how important to know the Bible is an authentic recording of God's words and ways.

This chapter validates and eulogizes our precious Bible. It is not exhaustive by any means, but certainly sufficient to convince the honest heart the Bible is indeed God's Word. I think the reader

will be warmed by the evidences brought forth, confirming what you already know by the witness of the Holy Spirit. The insights of this chapter were not birthed in me. They came, as most knowledge comes, from others. Who learned from others who learned from others. I suppose these perceptions could be considered family effects. So now we will look at that awesome book, our Bible, God's extremely precious Word to us.

OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus authenticates many of the Old Testament books by quoting from them. That deserves repeating....

Jesus authenticates many of the Old Testament books by quoting from them. These books must be as true as Jesus is true and the account of Christ's words in the gospels are accurate. "The truth" ("I am the way, the truth, and the life."), "Him who knew no sin", He whose "name which is above every name", the only Man *unable* to deceive or even exaggerate, indirectly but most assuredly certifies Old Testament writings by simply making reference to them.

When Jesus said, "It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city!", He established the trueness of the book of Genesis which gives the account of the destruction of those two cities. (Isn't it heart-warming to know that the Genesis Jesus studied during His grow-up years and His adult years and the Genesis we study is the same Genesis? The next time you read from the Old Testament consider that Jesus read those same words, though in a different language.)

Jesus accredits the book of Malachi by quoting from it (referring to John the baptist): "This is he of whom it is written: Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." Now get this: Since Malachi is established by Christ Himself to be true, Malachi can now be used to validate other books. Can you see that? Malachi makes reference to Deuteronomy, Leviticus, Numbers, Ezra, and Nehemiah. These references by Malachi validate these books. Using the same logic, these five books can, in turn, be used to validate other books of the Old Testament.

Jesus quotes from or makes reference to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Jonah, Zechariah and Malachi. Again, this reference authenticates these books. And again, these books can be used to validate other books they make reference to. *Can you see the huge network of  evidence intertwined throughout the Old Testament?* And we are just getting started.

All eight authors of the New Testament writings make reference to Old Testament books. True, their validation is quite secondary to that of Jesus. And yet if their writings are shown to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, as the church so claims and wholeheartedly believes, their endorsement would have to be considered significant. But are the New Testament writings actually inspired by God? More on

that later. Let's momentarily, for the sake of discussion, make an assumption they are truly inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Matthew makes reference to several Old Testament books, as does Mark, as does Luke, as does John, as does Paul, as does James, as does Peter, as does Jude. The network of evidence interwoven throughout Old Testament writings - assuming the New Testament is accurate - expands greatly because the books they reference can now be used to further validate each other.

FULFILLED PROPHECY

If you rightly prophesied, say, twenty out of twenty future events you would impress your friends. Their trust in your relationship with God would strengthen as your prophecies were fulfilled. Now let's say you wrote down those revelations in a book beforehand. Do you think your friends would consider your writing to be inspired of God? I think you know where I'm going....

Old Testament writings foretold the coming Christ would be born of a virgin. In Bethlehem. Of the lineage of Abraham. And Isaac. And Judah. And David. Hosea prophesied Jesus would come "out of Egypt"; we all know Joseph fled with his family to Egypt, returning years later when evil Herod was dead. It was foretold infants would be slaughtered in an attempt to eliminate the holy Child. It was foretold Jesus was to be preceded by one "crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'" Isaiah foretold Jesus would be a miracle worker - healing the lame, the blind, the deaf, the mute. David pronounced He would speak in parables. It was written Jesus would be betrayed by a friend. For thirty pieces of silver. It was said Jesus would be spit upon and slapped. They would beat Him with rods. They would ridicule Him. And pierce His hands and feet. And cast lots for His garment. And offer Him vinegar. Not one of His bones would be broken through the entire ordeal. He would be buried "with the rich". And be raised from the dead. And ascend into heaven.

Also, many events regarding the nation of Israel were prophesied and fulfilled, one of the most notable was the reestablishing of the State of Israel in 1948. No other nation has been dispersed throughout the world and reestablished. Every fulfilled foretelling is further evidence favoring the Old Testament.

Jesus appealed to Scripture as proof that He was who He said He was:

Jesus: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." (Jn.5:39)

Jesus: "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." (Lk.24:44)

Jesus: "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." (Jn.5:46)

Can you see Christ's appeal is Christ's validation? Would Jesus appeal to the Old Testament if it

were less than accurate, less than valid?

Also, Paul and Peter considered Scripture to be venerable:

2 Timothy 3:16: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

Romans 1:2: *which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.*

Romans 3:2: *the oracles of God.*

1 Peter 1:23: *having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.*

2 Peter 1:20, 21: *no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus did not quote from the New Testament. None of the twelve quoted from the New Testament. So how do we know the New Testament is accurate?

The Old testifies of the New. The New fulfilled many of the prophecies of the Old (others are yet to occur). The Old declared Jesus was to be born of a virgin; the New states Jesus was born of a virgin. The Old says He was to be a sacrifice for all; the New says He was a sacrifice for all. In many instances the New fulfilled the Old. The truths of the Old and the truths of the New are the same. Same God, same Messiah, same teachings, same promises, same happenings.

Let's look at Matthew.  Matt either told the truth in the gospel of Matthew or he fabricated. Writing what he wrote put him in grave danger, and logic tells us he would not have written what he wrote unless he had good reason. Like maybe he wanted to tell the truth about his Lord.

Matt was there the first time Jesus cleaned out the temple with a whip, turned over the tables spreading their coins all over, and declared the temple to be "My Father's house". The pharisees didn't like that. Made them real mad. And they didn't like the crowds following after Jesus. Didn't like Jesus condemning their hypocrisy. Didn't like Jesus exposing their greed. Didn't like Jesus calling them blind guides and whitewashed tombs and brood of vipers. Right in front of everybody.

And the pharisees would not have a strong affection for His apostles. Remember how scared they were when Jesus was arrested, how they fled in terror? Remember the panic attack Peter got when accused of being His associate? Remember the locked doors where they gathered after the crucifixion? Remember the imprisonment of Peter and John?

Matt was a marked man, as were all the apostles, certainly on the most-wanted list of the big guys.

The big guys had power. They convinced Pilate to execute a man (a Man) he knew to be innocent. Matt heard Jesus say: "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." And to the pharisees: "I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in the synagogues and persecute from city to city."

Matt was safe as long as he stayed close to Jesus. The pharisees didn't dare arrest Jesus because the crowds would turn on them because the crowds believed Jesus was sent by God because they seen the many miracles. That's why they arrested Jesus in darkness. But now Matt was on his own. Had he slithered out of Jerusalem, returned to Galilee, and kept his mouth buttoned, maybe the big guys would leave him alone.

The law of probability would suggest Matt was telling the truth. He was carrying out his assignment, doing what apostles do, declaring the truth about their Christ. And historians tell us he paid the ultimate price (martyred). The same logic can be transferred onto Mark and Luke and John (exiled). And the other New writers - Paul (stoned, imprisoned, executed) and Peter (martyred, perhaps crucified) and James (executed) and Jude (martyred). It took real conviction to declare the righteousness of a man who just recently hung between two thieves on a cross, a man rejected by a nation - their own nation.

Another reason these men were sure to be accurate in their account is because of who Jesus was - "the Truth". They had been disciples of the Truth for three years. They ate with and hiked with and suffered hardship with the Truth. Surely they would speak and write the truth about the Truth.

INNER WITNESS

Romans 8:16: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

Christians, to be fruitful, must learn to live by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. The christian's greatest confirmation of the legitimacy of both the Old and the New is this witness. You, in fact, have the ability to know by the Spirit what is true and what isn't. For many decades the early church has discerned the New Testament we now possess is "Scripture inspired by God".

Logic tells us since God gave His covenant children written Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, by which to rule their lives, surely He would provide the same for us who are under a new and better covenant. That being so, what except the Bible could they be?

LIFE CHANGER

The New Testament writings change individuals, this phenomena occurring hundreds of times per day throughout the world. Chances are before you finish this chapter several people somewhere will

have turned to Christ for salvation after learning the New Testament gospel. You and I are evidence of the spiritual power contained in those precious words of truth; we have been born-again. No other book can make such claims. None other gives new life. The New Testament has radically altered the course of history; the world would be entirely different if the New Testament was never written.

It has been my observation that catholics, myself included, rarely read the Bible until they became born of the Spirit in response to hearing the gospel. Then they read it hungrily. I once prayed for my little girl to have visions of heaven, and she did, and she immediately picked up the Bible to read. After first discovering Christ I read the Bible many hours every day. It seems a true spiritual experience will cause one to turn to *The Book,* an indication it is indeed God's Word.

## IT'S STILL HERE

The very survival of New Testament writings is further indication of its supernatural quality. What chance did they have to survive? Why should the world listen to jews; their ordinances and rituals made them seem to be such a peculiar people. Logic cannot explain why the words of a Nazarene miracle-worker, whose life ended in shame, should have ever survived.

But the New Testament books have more than survived - they have flourished, having long ago reached all nations. It can be found in the dentist office, the barber shop, the hotel room. It's at many inaugural ceremonies, executions, weddings, funerals. It is displayed on the altar of many churches, its verses are written on tombstones and wedding invitations.

The New Testament is preached, sung, taught, discussed, debated, and studied more than any other book. It outsells all books. Today it is being wept over, ridiculed and outlawed more than any other writing. Universally people rise early to contemplate its teachings in the stillness of the morning, and read a few verses before sleeping.

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Other words - teachings, sayings, writings - have come and gone, erased from memory and interest. But not so the New Testament. Could it be the New Testament is what Jesus referred to as "My words"? Jesus said the wise man builds on His sayings; surely He provided an account of those sayings.

## SPLENDOR OF THE WORD

Scriptures are pure. ("Every word of God is pure.") And true. ("The entirety of Your word is truth.") And spirit and life. ("The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.")

The Bible is powerful. ("The word of God is living and powerful.") And holy. ("The Holy Scriptures.") And sharp. ("Sharper than any two-edged sword.") And trustworthy. ("These words are true and faithful.")

The Word is everlasting. ("The word of the Lord endures forever.") And revolutionary. ("The disciples were astonished at His words.") And precious. ("How sweet are your words to my taste.") And soothing. ("Comfort of the Scriptures.")

*The Book* saves. ("It is the power of God to salvation.") And steers away from sin. ("Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.") And grows faith. ("Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.")

The Bible sanctifies. ("Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.") And sets free. ("You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.") And warns. ("He who despises the word will be destroyed.") And brings health. ("They are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.")

The Scriptures cause prosperity. ("Believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.") And give direction. ("Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.") And comfort. ("Comfort one another with these words.") And safety. ("If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.")

The Word engenders repentance. ("The men of Nineveh.... repented at the preaching of Jonah.") And verifies Christ. ("These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.") And teaches. ("All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.") And actuates joy. ("These things we write to you that your joy may be full.")

CHECK YOUR FEELINGS

How do you feel after reading this chapter?

If you feel lighter, safer, encouraged, strengthened it is because, mostly, you have just read many Scripture verses, this another indication that His words are indeed "spirit, and they are life". The Lord said through His prophet, "My word.... shall not return to Me void." You have been changed, even if imperceptibly.

We each have a glow about us. To one degree or another we are aglow in the Holy Spirit. You probably have a 3-way bulb somewhere in your house, you know, 50 watt-100 watt-150 watt. Are you able to imagine a 1000-way bulb? - instead of three clicks on the switch to get to full brightness, there is 1000. Now, are you able to imagine a 1000-way bulb in your inner person? Good. Every time you spend time in the Word - listening, reading, considering - you crank up the wattage slightly, not much, maybe from 346 to 347. The brightness of your light is relative to time spent, during your christianity, reading God's words. It has an accumulative effect. You are what you eat. You shine to the degree you feed on *The Book.* You may be a 347, your friend a 622, the crank who sits behind you in church a 19. Nobody is exactly the same.

Now suppose you have been into the Bible a total of twenty minutes today (much higher than

typical christian) and you spent two hours watching the boob-maker. Do you think your light got brighter or dimmer? Interesting question.

Hopefully this chapter will have the effect of deepening your conviction that the Bible is in truth the rock upon which you must build your life. Revival for me was, largely, an irreversible decision to obey the Bible rather than the teachings and accepted practices of the group I was at any time connected to. Building on the rock is acceptance and rejection - fully accepting the Bible and fully rejecting that which is contrary.

Should you make a serious heart-decision to follow the Christ of the Bible - an unalterable pact between you and Jesus to embrace His sayings, bow to His sayings, live by His sayings - you will never regret that decision in spite of the complications such a decision will most certainly actuate. Your Lord will deepen your hunger for His words. You will see and discern as never before. You will no longer be reading a book; you will be reading God's Word - infallible, creative, living, authentic, prosperous, awesome, praiseworthy, colorful, convicting, honest, redemptive, immovable, uncompromising, eternal, complete, changeless, sharp, inspirational, sure, lively, warm, protective, sincere, powerful, faithful, knowledgeable, just, holy, satisfying, joyous, life-giving, secure, effective, wise, medicinal, pure, fruitful, prophetic, indestructible and divine.

Chapter Eight

T H E  H O U S E

*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

Jesus wasn't all that interested in houses; He was concerned for people. He is concerned about the spiritual house each person is. Spiritually, you and I are a house (just like we are sheep, just like we are branches).

You are a house.

Houses have foundations. They are built on something. And so are we. In Christ's day concrete (as we know it) had not been invented, so they dug down to the rock, or built a rock footing. At least the wise builders did. The senseless built on sand. Sand is okay as long as it doesn't rain too hard. But bad storms do come and one day "the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house", the sand got washed away, and now the house is carried away in the flood. Like destroyed.

A few christians build their houses - their lives - on rock foundations, most christians build on sand

foundations, the double-minded build on both. Oddly, the one building on sand of tradition assumes he is building on the rock of the Bible. Most disobey while thinking themselves obedient. Strange.

We will know at the judgment seat of Christ on what foundation we had built our house.

PRAYER

You can't successfully build your house until you learn to get prayers answered, at least the ones prayed in accordance to the will of the Lord. How does one get his/her prayers answered?

Jesus: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (John, chapter 15) So there's Christ's formula for answered prayer: 1) We abide in Him and 2) His words abide in us.

What does it mean to *abide* in Christ? It simply means being tightly bonded to Him, maintaining an ongoing relationship. It means loving Him above every and all.

Abiding in Christ is resting in Christ, but to get to the place of rest is work. It's a struggle to make (or keep) Jesus the chief person in one's life. The untamed soul rises up in rebellion to the one daring to try. The soul is not meant to be master but, for most, is. The born-again spirit is meant to be master but, for most, isn't. To abide in Christ the soul must be dethroned. Dismissed. Kicked off the throne of one's life.

But that's not going to happen until we change. To advance from soul-controlled to spirit-controlled takes effort and time. It calls for a major investment of life. I am talking diligence. Casual must go. We start with a quality decision to put God first. And then it's lots of time in His Word, lots of time in His presence. Many, many alone hours, like maybe a thousand per year. The spiritually lazy will never abide in Christ satisfactorily.

And what does "and My words abide in you" mean?

Well first, it is impossible for the Word to abide in us until we put it in. The learning of the Word is longer than a lifetime process, and it begins at the moment of rebirth. When we become His He becomes our teacher and we become His students - students of His Word.

STUDENT OF THE WORD

A convert is one who has decided to come under the lordship of Jesus. Obviously he must center his life on Scripture. To be in fellowship with Christ while being indifferent or rebellious to *The Book* is a contradiction. To build one's life - one's house - upon the rock of the Word is an ongoing process of founding one's beliefs, hopes, standard, faith, future, habits, prayers, decisions and conversations from the Bible's perspective. That is why study should be serious.

The new believer has been a student of the world. Over the years he has adapted quite well to his society, having learned to speak, reason and dress harmoniously. But now he is a new person, dwelling in a new world, having been "born of the Spirit", having joined "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people". The old ways don't work. He must learn again. Since the success of one's christianity is relative to his relationship with the Word, it necessitates becoming a student (by student I mean *serious* student) of the Word. "Okay", thou thinkest, "how do I become a student of the Word?"

I have some suggestions:

1) DON"T COMPARE WITH OTHERS

Comparing yourself with others is a mistake. You attend a church of, say, 100 people. The average time per day they spend reading the word is dismal. Take away the top 5 and the average is *really* sad. You could be into the Word five minutes and look pretty good. But life would not be fruitful or satisfying.

2) CHOOSE YOUR TEACHER WISELY

Don't choose a good teacher, choose a great teacher. Choose the very best you can find. *Like priest like people* equals *Like teacher like student.* Find one who doesn't make mistakes. Check out his past performance. Does he have a solid grip on Scripture? Can he rightly divide? Yes, only the Holy Spirit qualifies.

John 16:13: *"When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth."* Choosing a man or an organization as teacher accounts for the meager results of most. Choosing the Holy Spirit as teacher is choosing Christ - who communicates to us by the Spirit, His Spirit. Yes, he calls some of us to be teachers, and yes, there is something to be learned through every christian. But He said plainly, "One is your Teacher, the Christ." To call a man "my teacher" (or to consider him to be so) is just as insulting to the Lord as calling an employer "my provider".

3) BE LED BY THE SPIRIT

Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth. He can't teach you *this* if you're busy learning *that.* He wants to teach from the gospel of John and you're way back there in Leviticus. He wants to impress upon your soul you are loved passionately and you're trying to determine if the rapture is pre- or post-trib. Notice John 16:13 says He will *guide* us into all truth. Doesn't say prod and doesn't say push. The degree of learning isn't predetermined by the Lord, but regulated by the student.

4) BE DILIGENT

2 Timothy 2:15: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* Diligence is needful. Can't succeed without it. Diligence calls for self-control. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. Lean heavily on the Holy Spirit. Convince Him of your desire to be under His governorship. Choose Him, earnestly and often.

Comparatively few of us live victorious, productive lives. Few walk on water, or raise the dead, or heal the sick. Many do not reproduce. Most are in spiritual bondage, having masters other than Jesus. The church walks by sight, not faith. Why? Most christians refuse to take the Word seriously. Missing is reverence for what He has said.

5) BE COMMITTED TO THE WORD

Success calls for commitment. No mixing the words of God with other words. No amendments. No allegiance to tradition. Loyalty to *The Book* is loyalty to Jesus Christ, is loyalty to the Father, is loyalty to the Holy Spirit.

6) SHUN BONDAGES

Spiritual bondage is accepting self, a man or a system as master, teacher and guide. Most do and most don't think they do. Peer pressure isn't only the woe of teens. Controllers are all about. Christians do not tithe in obedience to the Word, but capitulate to the persistent insistence of managers. That's why they call the man *Father/Pastor* Whoever. The Holy Spirit is leader in sentiment only.

There are churches in your city/town that are, at least in one category, in doctrinal error. Consider the people who attend. Why doesn't understanding come? Why doesn't the light go on? Why does truth continually evade them month after month, year after year, and yes, decade after decade?

The problem is not a *head* problem but a *heart* problem. There is something wrong with the relationship between believers and their church. Their teacher is man, their 'pastor' is man, they trust in, lean on, are disciples of man. Man, who we are adequately warned not to trust in, is their comfort and focus. Love for christians has long ago usurped love for Jesus. And they can't see it.

Spiritual bondage is a reality in the body of Christ. Loss of freedom paralyzes. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "If I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ." Paul was well aware he could not serve two. And neither can we. Paul made his choice. And so have we.

It is difficult to remain free. It really is. There are many in church leadership who feel it an obligation

to 'protect' you, to slot you into one of their many programs, to teach you to be a team player. They have been schooled to shepherd. Their joy is sovereignty. To be free in Christ, one can never be a denominational person. Again, to be free in Christ one cannot be denominational. Not to say you cannot attend a denominational church. But be careful and prayerful. The denominational people surrounding you want you to become one of them. This 'want' translates into pressure to conform. Yes, peer pressure.

Church history has proven man cannot be trusted. Men make mistakes - little men, fat men, intelligent men, honorable men, dedicated men. Most error often and ingeniously. Like the Galatians who accepted a "different gospel". Like the Corinthians who made wrong choices a way of life. The church of Ephesus left their First Love. In Pergamos they taught doctrines of Balaam. And you know Jesus threatened to spit the people of Laodicea out of His mouth. The early church almost compromised itself out of existence.

Today some attend a house church. One day many will attend a house church. Eyes are opening, hunger is deepening, the Spirit is moving, paths out of the established church system are being forged by the valiant. In a small gathering one does not feel overwhelmed. Nobody is after your money and everyone has, or should have, input. It is, or could/should be, a time of mutual ministry. But caution. Only the naive would assume a house somehow makes a gathering healthy. There is a way of determining the health of a group. Is the name of Jesus being mentioned? How often? How often reveals how healthy.

7) CHOOSE A TIME FOR STUDY AND PRAYER

If you do not manage your day your day will probably be less than victorious. (Victory, you must understand, is gaining Christ.) Life should be a pursuit, an ambition to gain intimacy with Jesus. Little victories accumulated is a large victory at the end of each year. There must be study time and there must be prayer time. If these are not priority they will dwindle until you become ugly average. Average will bring boredom and discontentment and ingratitude.

In order for the Word to abide in you, you must abide in the Word. Read, study, consider, memorize. Immersion will transform you. His sayings will not return void. Other words will lose relevance. Proverbs 4:20-22: *My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.*

DOERS OF THE WORD

James wrote, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only." Be doers of the Word and not scholars only. The doer is the wise man, not the scholar. Scholars make themselves more accountable by

learning. All professions of love for our Master are mere lip service to the one not keen to obey. The test of love is obedience. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. He who does not love Me does not keep My words."

In the heart of the lukewarm tradition has preeminence over *The Book.* The pharisees angered Jesus because of their love for tradition and their insistence others have equal affection. Binding oneself to their traditional teachings bonded oneself to them. That's how pharisees make pharisees. And that's how denominationalists make denominationalists.

As the twelve and as the seventy, we are called to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His conditions: "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." The frivolous cannot hear these words. It's discipleship, not fun. Discipleship, not social acceptance. Ambassadors of Christ, not ambassadors of christians. We represent Christ, not a denomination or the local assembly. We bow to His words only.

We who do do because we believe. Our trust is in the promise giver. He is able and eager to keep His promises.

SPEAKING AND HEARING

Jesus: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45)

The treasure of our heart has a certain value, and that value is revealed by the words we speak. Had you carried a recorder with you the past year, it would reveal what is inside you.

Can you see that what is inside you is what you allowed in?

Can you see that sitting under the ministry of the man you call pastor affects who you are? All these years his words have been entering your heart through your ears.

And can you see that if you sat under the ministry of another you would be affected differently, maybe better, maybe worse?

And can you see that different words affect you differently?

Can you see that, in a real sense, you sit under your own 'ministry'? No one ministers to your heart more than you because you hear yourself more than anyone. If that pastor affects you by the words he speaks, why would your words have a lesser effect?

And can you see the importance of speaking wisely? The pastor's words have a certain worth and so do yours. All words heard help determine the value of the "treasure" of your heart and, in

consequence, the outcome of your life. You have no control over what he or others say, but you can regulate your own speech.

Can you see  a possible need to learn to speak wisely? (Possible need; only you can determine.) This entails no small effort. Habits are hard to break. You must determine who will be the master of your speech. And whose ambassador you will be.

Can you see the benefit of speaking Bible? Speaking Bible is speaking truth and truth is good for you. Saying what Christ has said will make you more like Christ. (Just like speaking the devil's filthy language makes one more like the devil.)

Can you see that you have the power to turn your life around?

And can you see that your speech will help determine the wealth of your eternity, that wealth being revealed at the judgment seat of Christ?

Can you see that you depend entirely on the power of God to radically improve the quality of words proceeding from your mouth? James was inspired to write, "No man can tame the tongue." But Jesus said, "With God all things are possible." With God. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." With God through Christ. You must know that God can. And God will - with your cooperation.

David: "I *say,* 'You are my God. Let such as love Your salvation *say* continually, 'The Lord be magnified!' Let the redeemed of the Lord *say* so. I will *declare* Your name to My brethren. I will *declare* Your greatness. I will *extol* you, O Lord. I will *sing* praise to Your name, O Most High. I will *sing,* yes, I will *sing* praises to the Lord."

David had a superb relationship with the Lord. His saying, declaring, extolling, and singing were not only an indication of the valuable treasure of his heart, but also had the effect of nurturing his heart. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We should envy David and learn from him.

James tells us of the power of the tongue to do evil: "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. It defiles the whole body." That being so, cannot the tongue be used to do good? To bless others and bless oneself? If hearing condemning words harm us, will not encouraging words build us up?

Can you see a daily dosage of truth, spoken by you and spoken by others, can transform and enrich your heart?

And can you see a daily dosage of useless and contrary words, spoken by you and others, can pollute and devalue your heart?

And can you see how potent your words are to others, to do them good and to do them harm?

Can you see that the tongue is to the christian as the rudder is to a ship? - dictating the direction in

which the believer travels through life. (James, chapter 3) The mature believer is slow to speak, always measuring his words and predetermining their consequences.

Chapter Nine

THE STORM

*"and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house;"*

There has not been a house, except recently built, that hasn't been pummeled by a storm. And spiritually there has not been a house - a christian - who has not been, or soon will be pummeled by a storm. We all pass through times of trouble. Jesus warns there is a storm to be unleashed against both the wise man and the foolish. Storms are a fact of life on planet earth. (Hang on, heaven is just around the corner!) The student of the word must comprehend the purpose of storms, who sends them, and how to deal with them.

This is no small issue. You have a Friend and you have an enemy. Does the enemy send storms to destroy you, or does the Friend send storms to better your character? If it's the Friend sending the storm you dare not rebuke it. If it's the enemy how do you deal with him?

There are many christian spokesmen who teach the Lord is the one who creates and directs all or some of the storms every christian encounters - this for the purpose of bringing the believer into maturity and sanctification. You have heard it said: "The Lord has everything under control." ("Everything" includes storms, right?) And: "God is sovereign." (Nothing happens unless He allows it.) Many reputable people have expressed those convictions in books and songs. Let's call their teachings 'doctrines of affliction'.

DOCTRINES OF AFFLICTION

There are several doctrines of affliction. One teaches it is the Lord who torments as a means of shaping christians into vessels of His choice, much like the potter shapes a lump of clay. Another teaches it is the devil who afflicts, but the Lord may withhold His mercy until He accomplishes His intended result. Another suggests we praise God for, not in spite of, every hurt and loss. God will send (or allow) storms in the form of sickness, accidents, failures, betrayal, assault, poverty, misunderstandings, confusion and loneliness in order to shape our character. At least one author has presented the following logic: God created Lucifer because God knew he would rebel and.... eventually become our enemy and.... now we have someone to combat and.... thus prove our faithfulness to God and.... become strengthened in character and.... become worthy and capable

sons and daughters and.... cause our praise unto the King to be pure and pleasing.

Most, it seems, strongly believe in one of the many doctrines of affliction. Complicating the issue is the fact that storms often *do have* the positive effect of bringing the afflicted into closeness with Christ. Storms of life can cause us to turn to Christ in prayer. Need often precedes humility. A friend was convinced that God authored all problems for the betterment of christians and articulated that opinion several times. After one of his monologues I told him a story - not a true story, one might call it a parable:

*There was a happy christian driving in harsh winter conditions with his family. God was looking down at this fellow with passionate love and, because of that love, caused him to have a flat tire. He gets out of the warm car and into the driving wind, opens the trunk, figures out how to use the *#*#*# jack. It's bitter cold, his gloves are at home, and he's wearing a light jacket. He jacks the car up, removes the flat tire from the wheel after fighting five very stubborn bolts, takes the spare out of the trunk, and discovers it's flat! More*#*#*#. The devil sees all this and he doesn't like it. All this distress might cause that *#*#*# christian to become a better disciple of Christ. Can't have that. So he sends a tow truck by. Guy gets out, hooks on to the car, and tows him to a garage. Doesn't charge a cent.* Now my friend is looking at me intensely, anticipating a punch line. And I gave it to him: *That makes the devil that christian's deliverer!* "Arrogance! Such arrogance!" my very angry friend repeated over and over, frustrated because he could not refute my logic. I was actually nervous he was going to hit me.

Doctrines of affliction diametrically oppose the promises. Faith says when all requirements of a particular promise are accomplished God is bound to keep His word. The doctrines of affliction say, "Not necessarily so", suggesting God has the prerogative to withhold from His commitment. Faith cannot bear such a condition.

James: *Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man unstable in all his ways.*

The christian who is uncertain who sends an affliction is "a double-minded man", not able to counter the problem with confidence. The "shield of faith" is to "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one", not fiery darts of the Lord.

WHO SENT THE STORM?

You know the story: Jesus is asleep in the boat when "a great tempest arose on the sea", they woke Jesus up, He "rebuked the winds and the sea", and "there was a great calm". Now since this chapter is about storms, an obvious question is....

Who sent that storm? Solve that question and we deepen our understanding of who sends the many storms we all encounter periodically. But it's a complicated issue. The devil does not have free

course to just do what he wants, and neither do the ministering angels whose job it is to protect us. I do not know who or what caused the storm that Jesus rebuked. But I know who didn't.

I know Jesus didn't send the storm; He was asleep. I know the Father didn't send the storm; Jesus would never rebuke His Father's work. ("If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.") Certainly the Holy Spirit did not cause it. Then who sent the storm?

Did satan send the "great tempest"? Does he have such power? he somehow was able to take Jesus "up into the holy city (and) set Him on the pinnacle of the temple". And he also brought Jesus onto "an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world". 2 Thes.2:9: *The coming of the lawless one is according to the work of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.* But surely if the devil had the power to create storms at will, life on earth would be one ugly, non-stop storm.

Did circumstances create that storm on the "sea of Galilee"? Did certain climatic conditions converge to create a natural havoc? I don't know.

## CHRISTIANS CREATE STORMS

Christians often bring turbulence upon themselves and upon others. An unfaithful spouse destroys a family. A braggart self-inflicts. ("Pride goes before destruction.") Preachers wrongly dividing the Word cause havoc. A rebellious teen puts herself under a curse by disrespecting her parents. Choosing taste over nutrition will eventually have ill consequences on our earthsuit. Most refuse the guidance of the Holy Spirit and miss God's blessings. Sheep straying from the Shepherd get themselves into a real mess.

And obedience causes storms. The three-year ministry of Jesus was a three-year confrontation with the pharisees. Paul was martyred because he was faithful. We have all read of believers in communist lands bringing strife to their family by declaring the gospel. The one taking a stand against church injustice will be a marked man. "All who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (will be battered by storms).

## WAR ZONE

Ephesians 6:11-18: *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Yes, we live in a war zone. In war there are calamities and injuries and deaths. Especially for those daring to fight on the front lines. The enemy isn't paying much attention to the frivolous; they don't

do much harm to the kingdom of darkness. The lukewarm are not concerned with "principalities", "powers", "rulers of the darkness", and "spiritual hosts of wickedness". Their enemies consist of what they see, and what they see are "flesh and blood" people. People are the enemy.

Disciples of Christ, on the other hand, attract opposition. They preach the Word, and the Word "is the power of God to salvation". "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Darkness wants to shut them up. However, the enemy's demon-power is limited; they cannot reproduce. One could safely conclude the most effective strategy is to oppose those most passionate to serve their Christ.

CAN WE STILL THE STORMS?

Jesus healed, and so did the disciples (in His name). Jesus cast out demons and so do christians (in His name). Christ's ministry was accompanied with signs and wonders, and so was Peter's, etc. So if Jesus stilled the storm, why can't we? Is there anything an adopted son or daughter can't do? Let's check it out:

Ph'p. 4:13: *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* All things. All good things that Christ did. Jesus said, "And greater works than these shall he do." He told the eleven (and thus told us), "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." And Jesus also said, "Ask and you shall receive." Yes, we can quiet the storms by exercising authority and/or through prayer. But not all....

SOWING AND REAPING

Question: *Why is it that God doesn't answer some prayers?* Answer: *He can't.*

From Genesis to Revelation a lesson is taught and demonstrated: We reap what we sow. It is more than a natural phenomena, it is a promise of God. The best example is the judgment seat of Christ whereby we will be rewarded for "the things done in the body.... whether good or bad". For some, perhaps most, it will be a major disappointment and embarrassment. The Lord, though "His mercy endures forever", will not trespass against His promise by giving rewards we have not earned.

Same on earth. We reap what we sow and that harvest often builds into a major, ugly storm that will upset our lives. We pray, but seemingly to no effect. God is not about to break His promise. That is why He will not answer our prayers (except they be preceded by deep repentance and packed with sufficient faith). So what do we do?

We sow good seeds. (Contrition is a good seed.) The good counteracts the bad. No, good seed doesn't negate bad seed, but simply helps to neutralize the ill effect. You raise a child. If you plant nothing but good seed the child would be expected to blossom into a dedicated disciple of Christ. If your seed is all bad.... well, you can imagine the result. If you plant both good and bad seed, as most

parents do, the resultant adult could be less than favorable. (Also, the child herself is planting seeds into her life, as well as teachers, friends, relatives.)

AUTHORITY

Jesus: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

Jesus: "I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy."

Christians have authority over the powers of darkness. The sad fact the church rarely uses that power does not negate the truth that it really is ours. So who allows the storms (storms we did not create through disobedience)? Again, who is the 'allower' and the 'disallower'?

The word 'allow', though often in our speech, is rarely used in the New Testament, and never in the sense of God allowing. It is not that God permits certain storms in our life, but rather He is rendered powerless to prevent them. Because He gave His word. Because of His integrity. Let us reason together:

God cannot determine the fate of man. He is limited by His promises, His holiness, His integrity. God cannot offend God. He cannot contravene His nature. At times His holiness causes Him to react in a manner painful to Himself. The good Father gave His beloved Son as a sacrificial offering because He had no other option. Only the sacrifice of deity would appease deity. Justice and holiness demanded such a price. And so "in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Father did not 'allow' Christ's suffering, He had no choice (if He was to rescue us). His holiness nailed Jesus to the cross. And it's that holiness that often prevents Him from coming to our rescue.

God entrusted a certain authority to man, giving him "dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." It is obvious Adam lost that authority when he first sinned against God. Where did this authority go? Into whose hands did it fall?

satan now possessed it, having stolen it from man through deception. That was the purpose of the temptation in Eden, to capture the dominion given to man from God. That's why he could confidently say to Jesus, in the wilderness, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me." (Delivered by who?) Jesus did not contest the devil's claim. If the claim was a pretense it would not be a temptation. satan does have authority and that's why Paul referred to him as "the god of this world".

Why didn't God simply take back that stolen authority from the thief. Again, the answer is God's holiness. It is not righteous to take what does not belong to Him. The "dominion over.... every living thing" no longer belonged to God. He did not *loan* it to man, He *gave* it to man. Obviously the enemy was certain God was not going to take it back, or else he would not have stolen it.

satan, to this day, has the authority God entrusted to Adam. On that memorable trip to Damascus Jesus said to Paul, "I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from *the dominion of* Satan to God. (NASB)" Fortunately you and I "are not of this world". "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Also, we have been given "authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy." "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

Yes, God became a man so that as a man He could conquer the enemy. A man lost authority and a man must regain it. John 3:8: *For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."* He imparted to His church the authority and power to do what He did. The church can arrest the devil's activities but because of misunderstandings, because of unchecked influence of Negotiators and Compromisers who seriously weaken the church, because of the many "doctrines of demons" (certainly including doctrines of affliction), and because of depraved unbelief and paralyzing fear we do not exercise the authority we have been given.

Christians in heaven no longer have authority down here. Only those here have authority here. And soon we will be there, no longer able to bless mankind. In our community there are cherry orchards which often get pelted by rain just before harvest time - which can cause the cherries to split. After one such rainfall a friend protected his crop by exercising his faith and authority. His was the only orchard in his area that didn't have split cherries.

Can you see it was *the church* that disallowed one crop to split, and it was *the church* that allowed the other crops to be split? (If the church protected one crop could it not protect all crops?) If the church can protect cherries it can obviously protect people - from sickness and demons and accidents. We have the authority. What we lack is the faith and understanding and resolve to exercise that authority.

Contrary to the belief of many, God does not control the war on planet earth. It is His will that none should perish, but many will. The "god of this world" does not control the war. It is his will that all should perish with him, but many won't. The population of heaven and hell will be decided by.... the church. Us. You and I and all. The redeemed, the set apart ones. We are, now, determining the eternal fate of millions and millions. Scary.

SANCTIFICATION

After rebirth comes sanctification. Sanctification is a lifetime process of cleansing, maturing, strengthening. Old habits and mentalities are pruned away, lumps are removed from the clay, a new wineskin is in the making, the babe is in the Master's hands.

Because God is love He accepts the convert as she is. And because God is love He will never be

satisfied until maturity is accomplished. Meticulously, steadfastly, He deals with the ill effects of sin, transforming His child into the person she was originally intended to be. Sanctification is something the Lord does - with the believer's cooperation. Though we have no power to change ourselves, we determine our rate of growth. We enhance or stifle the process.

Sanctification is accomplished, mostly, through the Word. Our Lord does not require storms, only surrender. When Jesus prayed for "those whom You have given Me" He said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." He told the twelve, "I am the true vine and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it might bear more fruit." Okay, so how does the Father prune us so we bear more fruit? The Father prunes us the same way Jesus pruned the twelve: "You are already pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message (word) I have given you. (NLT)"

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her *with the washing of the water by the word."* Peter wrote, "Desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."

When some hear or read the word 'prune' they conclude everything from canker sores to cancer, from unpaid bills to bankruptcy, from earwigs to earthquakes. Indeed there is a slower, more painful way to get pruned. It is the path of most. The process of typical christian goes something like this: he refuses the governorship of the Holy Spirit who desires to protect his intimacy with Jesus and.... because he distanced himself from His protection, a violent storm eventually overtakes his life and.... after suffering the consequences of his backsliding he finally repents in brokenness and.... he is once more teachable and humble. (Unfortunately he may conclude *God* sent the tempest to bring him to repentance. That's how false doctrines are birthed - making deductions from experiences rather than *The Book.*)

But such - praise the Lord! - is not God's way. His way is demonstrated, clearly, through the life and ministry of Christ on earth. Jesus *preached.* Jesus *taught.* Jesus *scolded* and *rebuked.* He used *words* to accomplish the Father's will in the hearts of men. That's how God affects our hearts. He speaks to us. ("My sheep hear My voice.") As we are saved by hearing the gospel words, we are likewise sanctified by His words.

## Chapter Ten

## S A N D

*Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:*

Sand. Spiritually, sand is the opposite of rock. Since rock is Scripture, sand must be non-Scripture. Sand is something else - foreign words, other gospels, tales of deception, vain imaginations.

Obviously rock and sand are authored by opposites.

Rock and sand. In you (and all) are both. In your spiritual tummy resides truth and lies. Both don't reign but both affect. Both bear fruit through your life - good fruit, bad fruit. If you had more truth and less deception you would be happier. The angry woman contains more myth than fact, the content man more truth than untruth.

See yourself for what you are, a container of both rock and sand. Before conversion you had a scarcity of truth and an abundance of untruth. After, truth began to crowd out lies, but there are still some there. Your demeanor, at times, reveals it.

Rock and sand. How much of each is a result of the life you have lived, a product of your priority list. The one spending two hours in *The Book* has more truth than the one going days without opening it. Words have power to bless and to harm. Words bring truth that sets free and untruth that confines. The man who believes that God merely tolerates him will live in contrast to the man believing Bible words assuring God's passionate love and doting oversight. The woman *hoping* the Lord will forgive her after another failure will bear less fruit than the one *accepting* her forgiveness immediately after repentance.

PHARISEES

Pharisees were back then and pharisees are here and now. Always were and always will be. They are in the world and they are in the church, preferring the pulpit to the pew. It seems, however, pharisees back then were *super*-pharisees whose capacity for evil was so ingrained in their bitter souls they actually plotted the murder of Immanuel, God-with-us.

Most of us fretfully work at appearing to be someone we are not. We are defiled by a world thoroughly steeped in imagery whereby what/who I appear to be matters much more than what/who I am. When sad I put on happy, when afraid I put on brave, when envious I put on well-pleased. Appearance is what matters. But pharisees are *big-league* pretenders. For some reason they have an uncommon need to be envied and approved and regarded. Jesus loves pharisees but loathes the pharisaic spirit.

Becoming a bona fide pharisee, like becoming a genuine tradesman, is not an overnight happening. It takes years for integrity to be broken down, dishonesty a must-have qualification. Many times the candidate when faced with him-or-me chose me, driven by a twisted ambition. Each selfish decision has chiseled away at his honor until attaining reverence meant more than giving it, and associates were used as stepping stones to greater glory. Constantly rebuffing the conviction of the Holy Spirit to repent, to turn from self and become a disciple of Christ, caused their hearts to contract. As Adam and Eve hid, so must this hardened, skillful controller conceal his true person. He masks himself, expertly appearing to be what he isn't. A bona fide hypocrite has evolved. Angry and miserable.

Pharisees in our midst, like the ancients, are Adders and Subtracters, Negotiators and Compromisers whose concern for prominence far surpasses the need to obey and the need of the sheep they insist on governing. The underling trespassing traditions that give them preeminence, or, equally so, the one threatening the flow of money that finances their supervision is, understandably, the enemy.

Jesus accused the ancient pharisees of "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men". They knew teaching the commandments of God would make their minions followers of God. Their reverence would be directed away from them to another. Can't have that.

Jesus challenged, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father and mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatsoever profit you might have received from me has been dedicated to the temple" - 'is released from honoring his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition."

God said honor your parents, the pharisees said you don't have to honor your parents. So why *did* they pervert the command of the very God they claimed to represent? Notice the issue was money. They profited from that which was "dedicated to the temple". Perhaps tithe money wasn't enough to cover salaries and perks. Remember, these are the guys "who devour widows' houses". Undoubtedly they got a huge cut from "those who bought and sold in the temple", you know, the ones who encountered the wrath of Jesus.

And there is another reason. Do you remember Jesus saying, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."? One's allegiance will follow his treasure. Giving money - money that should have gone to aging parents - "to the temple" had the effect of shifting allegiance from parents to the keepers of the temple.

Today's *mini*-pharisees lack the deep anger and ferocity of their fathers, but nonetheless demonstrate finesse at controlling the numbers. Their faithfulness to tradition, while not admirable, is certainly impressive. They have thoroughly persuaded the masses to build on the same sand their houses are built, to bow to their lords, to finance their projects.

LAYMEN

Let's call the common folk who were witnesses of the many confrontations between Jesus and the *super*-pharisees what they would be called today - laymen. Four questions for consideration:

1. Were laymen individually responsible to compare the doctrines of their elders with the doctrines of Scripture?

2. Were laymen responsible to obey the word of the Lord ("Honor your father and mother.") over the

traditional teaching of the elders ("You really don't have to if you direct that money 'to the temple'."), even though they would surely offend leadership?

3. Would the layman choosing obedience to man over God be less hypocritical than the pharisees?

4. Will that layman's house, though built on sand, be protected because he was victimized?

There is most definitely a parallel between the pharisee-layman relationship and the priest-charismatic relationship and the evangelical-pastor relationship. Any alliance resulting in disobedience to *The Book* is dangerous and costly. It is only faithfulness to Jesus Christ that brings every good thing.

## TRADITIONS OF MEN

There are many traditions of men. Man has always been adept at creating rules and philosophies. All are sand, sand being that which is not rock, rock being that which God has said. Jesus declares those who build their life on sand are foolish. So much sand indicates so many fools.

The New Testament has many words synonymous to the word *sand*, such as: *commandments of men.... evil thoughts.... error.... doctrines of demons.... yoke on the neck.... leaven of the Pharisees.... heavy burdens.... ignorance.... various and strange doctrines.... damnable heresies.... pernicious ways.... deceivings.... great swelling words of emptiness.... smooth words and flattering speech.... wisdom of this world.... persuasive words of man's wisdom.... thoughts of the wise.... another gospel.... empty words.... cunning craftiness.... wind of doctrine.... corrupt communication.... philosophy and empty deceit.... basic principles of the world.... blasphemy.... strong delusion.... fables and endless genealogies.... old wives fables.... profane and vain babblings.*

Obviously the early church was seriously infected with sandy doctrines. Unfortunately their malady is our malady. They had their "various and strange doctrines" and we have ours. "Smooth words and flattering speech" were common then and now. Only the spiritually incapacitated cannot see the similarity between giving "to the temple" and tithing to the local assembly. Of calling a man "Rabbi" and calling a man "Reverend". Of considering oneself "of Paul" or "of Apollos" or "of Cephas" and considering oneself to be catholic or pentecostal or baptist.

Most charismatics and most evangelicals build, to a large degree, on "commandments of men". They have the same confidence in their respective systems, c/w its officers, as the ancient laymen had in theirs. Let us examine a few doctrines on which typical charismatics/evangelicals build their house:

## UNITY VS DIVISION

A Jehovah witness, a young man, once suggested to me that the unity of their membership is an

indication their organization is indeed God's true spokesman on earth. They are not like so-called christians divided into several denominations. I asked if his organization was, in the past, united on matters they themselves have since found to be erroneous. "Yes", he replied, "but it is better to be united in error than divided over truth!"

I am using that young man as a mirror. Charismatics/evangelicals often equally insulate themselves from truth by the same bizarre logic. In the People of Faith community - having embraced a popular persuasion transmitted throughout the charismatic movement via book writers, etc. - unity was emphasized much more than the need for truth. Unity was considered a good fruit, and one upsetting the peace with valid questions was an annoyance. So no one questioned.

And unity is equally emphasized from evangelical pulpits, each preacher assuming his denomination has it altogether, challenges not welcomed, thank you. The evangelical preacher, the charismatic prayer group leader and the watchtower society overseer actually have much in common - all are doctrinally sound.... in their own estimation. None want to be challenged. Unity is founded on an agreement to agree. So we have three enormous organizations opposed to most of each other's beliefs, yet united within - united in truth and united in error.

Challenging is something we don't do enough of. We are so keen on being nice and accepted, we compromise our understanding of truth. Everyone wants to fit in, and our need for acceptance prevents us from hearing the contrary voice of the Holy Spirit. Sensitivity to christians eclipses sensitivity to Christ. This is sin, and sin always brings negative consequences.

Paul the apostle, when in Antioch, was in an awkward predicament. He and Barnabas were in the company of Peter and other believers when a group "of the circumcision" came by. Peter had no reservation about eating with the gentile converts, but now, Paul noticed, he began to withdraw from the gentiles "fearing those who were of the circumcision". "And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy."

This is a perfect picture of public peer pressure. Those "of the circumcision", simply by being who they were and by their presence, applied pressure on Peter. Which had the effect of Peter compromising. Which added to the peer pressure on others. Which had the effect of "the rest of the Jews" compromising. Which added to the peer pressure on others. Which had the effect of Barnabas compromising. Which added to the peer pressure on the only man who had not capitulated - Paul. (But, praise the Lord!, he didn't, instead confronting Peter "to his face.... before them all".)

That's how peer pressure in the church (in the organization, in the social gathering, in the family) works. One influences another and, now united, the two together are more powerful to influence the third, and, now united, the three.....

Let's again look at Peter in the hopes of seeing ourselves. It is written, "When they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision." Why was Peter afraid? Why did Peter need the approval of man when he already possessed the approval of God? Why

would Peter offend the Lord to gain acceptance of those walking immorally? Perhaps unity meant more to Peter than integrity. Perhaps, like the young Jehovah witness, he reasoned, "It is better to be united in error than divided over truth!"

Peter was a disciple of Christ and yet he compromised. Though an apostle, he bent to peer pressure. He walked with Christ for three years, yet he buckled under pressure. The Lord Jesus personally commissioned Peter to "Feed My sheep", yet he betrayed those sheep. Such the power of peer pressure upon Peter. And upon the others. And upon you and me.

You have got to see it. Compromise is what charismatics do. Compromise is what evangelicals do. You are surrounded by compromisers. Unless you are exceptional, you have already bowed to the persuasions of those "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men". Long ago you went the way of the many, forsaking the way of the One. You have got to see it.

Galatians chapter five lists nine fruit of the Holy Spirit. Unity is not one of them. John taught, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." Which means, "If we walk in truth we will have unity." But it is also true that "Those who do not walk in the light have fellowship with one another." Which means, "Those walking in darkness are united." Unity, then, is not necessarily something to boast about. We ought not concentrate on unity, but rather walking "in the light as He is in the light." We want to be united with Christ and with those who are united with Christ.

Misapplied unity helped make us the dependents we are. The student of the Word must know true doctrine will always find an example in Christ. The Bible not only declares the love of Jesus but also the inelasticity of Jesus. He never compromised the Father's ways. If you want to be united with Him you have to do things His way. He doesn't meet you halfway.

## COMMITMENT TO WHO?

Upon entering evangelicalism, I discovered charismatics were not the only ones emphasizing commitment to the group. The obvious - placing one's commitment onto fellow christians necessitates removing that commitment away from Jesus - escapes most.

The Bible only speaks of commitment to God. Solomon: "Commit your works to the Lord." David: "Commit your way to the Lord." Paul: "Owe no man anything but to love one another." None of the Bible writers encourage commitment to christians. Yet many preachers mangle *The Book* to make it appear to say something it does not. Perhaps because their motive is blemished. The preacher is the leader of the group, so his call for commitment to the group is really a call to commitment unto himself. Dangerous.

A christian is one who has entered into a covenant relationship *with God.* Only with God. A covenant is a contract or agreement. In this everlasting contract between God and man in which Christ is the mediator, both parties are committed *to each other* according to the terms of the contract. In this

contract God shares His possessions with the born-again believer and the believer is to hold back nothing of herself from God. It is a forever commitment. The cost of this covenant is the blood of Christ. It is sacred and priceless.

There is no room left in one's heart for a second commitment, not to country, not to the brethren, not to a cause. It would be like a man having two wives - both will demand his loyalty. Or like a man swearing allegiance to two countries; in the event of war between the two, he is obliged to both defeat and defend both.

It is not uncommon for charismatics to enter into a covenant relationship with each other, thus entering serious spiritual bondage. The Holy Spirit would never lead His kids into such a relationship. The Word teaches a responsibility *for* each other, not *to* each other. We love and support our brothers and sisters because of our commitment to Christ. It is Christ we obey. He is our savior, teacher, lord, mediator, judge and king.

A somewhat resemblance to this ungodly contract within evangelicalism is church membership. Membership, often, is committing oneself to christians instead of the governance of the Holy Spirit. A member is expected to give financially, usually ten percent minimum, without consulting Jesus on the matter. There are rules to follow, written and unwritten, meant to boost the influence of the local church and its overseeing denomination. Life of a dedicated member is certainly inferior to the life dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

VISIONS AND PROPHECIES

Jesus will never be insulted by the christian testing any and every vision and prophecy. It was Jesus who commanded the believer to build on His words, and He will not be offended by the student prudent to do that very thing. Visions and prophecies are not all from God, and the ones that are can be misinterpreted. One person shared a vision he received before a large group of catholic charismatics - for which the people enthusiastically praised and thanked God - of Mary, the 'queen of heaven' seated in triumph and splendor in the heavens, invoking her children to turn to her. (It is not coincidental that the person with the vision prayed the rosary and listened to praise songs to Mary.)

Prophetic bondage, an ailment of many charismatics, is fear of going to the left or right without first hearing from a local prophet. Evangelicals, on many issues, must have the endorsement of 'their' pastor. This is done in a slippery manner, convincing themselves they are merely seeking his advice.

All should be appreciative of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit through visions and prophecies. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to "desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy". He admonished the Thessalonians: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies." But then he added: "Test all things." John cautions: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits,

whether they are of God."

BAPTISM

Baptism is not an invitation; it is a command. Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." He commanded the eleven, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Peter commanded the three thousand, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized." (Since believing and repenting precede baptism, there is no basis for infant baptism. And of course there is no Bible precedent.)

Baptism should immediately follow conversion, the first act of submission to the Lord Jesus. Refusing baptism to appease others is a poor way to begin one's christianity.

Baptism can break the charismatic cycle. A decision to obey Jesus, even if five years late, could cause revival, the first step in rebuilding one's life, this time upon the rock of Christ's words. Some charismatics get baptized in secret so as not to fall out of favor with the group, this an insult to the Lord and unfair to those who might have followed them in baptism. Jesus reasoned, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket, or under a bed?"

It is an evangelical absurdity that only the pastor baptizes. Is not the command of Christ - "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" - directed to the entire church, every christian?

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is wisdom and obedience bears good fruit and obedience is possible and obedience is rewarded. Jesus will help the one determined to build on His sayings, even though he/she will have occasional upsets. God is the God of another chance. He will forgive seven times seventy times. Solomon: "The complacency of fools will destroy them; But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure."

Epilogue

R E V I V A L ! !

Revival!.... another chance!

Revival!.... restricted to backsliders.

Revival! A beautiful word. Like *love* and *peace* and *goodness* and *joy*. The word sends shivers of hope

and excitement throughout the prodigal heart. It arouses memories of yesterday when Jesus was king, when life was as it should be, when purpose was wholesome, when fruit was evident, when friends were blessed by one's presence.

Revival! The good shepherd has found the lost sheep. The lost coin has been found and the woman is dancing. Heaven celebrates and hell is in remorse.

Prodigal son: *I am tired of this pigsty! And I hate pigs! Why should I stay in this muck and stench when I have a father who is loaded? I'm dirty, I'm hungry, and I stink! I'm outta here! I will say to my father,"I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."*

Several times every day the old man surveys the horizon where he last saw his son's frame diminish with every hurried step until he was no more. Gone.

*My son! My son! Why? Why did you leave? What did you not have? All my possessions I shared with you. You slept in a fine bed. You sat at my table while servants waited on us. Are you ever coming home? Are you.... still.... alive?*

*My son!! Is that him coming over the hill!? That's him! I know his stride! His fat is gone and his clothes are rags, but that's my boy!! Servants, quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and sandals on his feet! And bring the fatted calf here and kill it! Let's party!!"*

*My son was lost and now is found.* Revival!

Promise: *If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* (2Chr.7:14)

Promise: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1Jn.1:9)

Promise: *As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.* (Rev.3:19,20)

Promise: *The Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him.* (2Chr.30.9)

Promise: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Mt.11:28)

Promise: *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.* (Is.55:7)

Revival! A return trip to Calvary.

Revival! Kneeling once again on the bloodied ground.

Revival! For the humble only. The proud must bear their burdens.

Jesus. The master builder *and* the master re-builder.

Jesus. He can mend the broken life.

Jesus. He will forgive.

Revival! "Jesus I come to you now!"

Revival! "I choose you, Jesus!"

Revival! Jesus again takes His rightful place on the throne of the contrite heart.

Revival! Breaks the charismatic cycle.

Revival! Breaks the evangelical cycle.

Jesus. Sin-bearer, advocate.

Jesus. Coming king.

Jesus. Elder brother.

Jesus.