ANOTHER NINETY-FIVE

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Category: Another Ninety Five

PROLOGUE

My neighbor across the road, one house north, so close I could hit his house with a snowball, is a good brother in the Lord Jesus, a pastor of a small church.

My neighbor across the road, one house north, so close I could hit his house with a snowball, is a good brother in the Lord Jesus, a pastor of a small church. We rarely see each other, never visit, a wave once in a while, he has his life and I have mine.

Though close we are not close.

My sister lives four provinces away. We communicate often, pray together for unsaved siblings, unload on each other, carry one another's burdens.

Though distant we are not distant.

Institutional churches institutionalize Christ's own. An institutionalized christian, though physically close to *The Good Shepherd,* is relationally more distant than he once was. Jesus aches for his return and sends agents to seek and find, and express His willingness to forgive and reunite.

Martin Luther has been called "the great reformer". He would disagree. Jesus alone is *The Great Reformer*, and this hero of the faith was privileged and sufficiently courageous to be used as *The Reformer's* voice in a dark and dreary and dreadful religiosity.

The 'protestant reformation' was quite incomplete. An improved church, definitely; a finished church, hardly. Though Luther's light brightened his era, this gutsy brother is but one voice of many used in Christ's unstoppable program of amending His people. Reform began in the church's infancy, and the work of sanctification is ongoing, benefitting all having "ears to hear" what Lord Jesus is saying to His church through His church.

Religion is an ever-present danger, menacing Christ's redeemed saints through the centuries. It abducts newborns quickly, and sets them in one of its drab confinements enclosed by a formidable fence of imaginative doctrines. Relative few escape, and even those are in danger of recapture, such is the strength of religion's unceasing pull and coercive officers.

The institutionalized evangelical can see his Master way off, but will not betray the pack by running after Him. He has been schooled to believe there is safety only in togetherness. As in Luther's day,

so many can't be wrong.

Lord Jesus has zero interest in reforming our institutional churches. Both compete for the hearts of His redeemed, and the score is discouraging. Our Lord wants to set the captives free from the calendar, the clock, and the church bulletin - to bring them into at least a semblance of the sensitivity to the Spirit He possessed while here.

There is a life in the Spirit. Everyone experienced that life when first reborn. For most, the happiest days are way back there - back there when life was a fresh breeze, religion had not yet ensnared, and Jesus was "first love".

Back there is still there, still beckoning, still attainable. The few who have found their way back are sufficient evidence that life in the Spirit - that fresh breeze - can be retrieved.

Lord Jesus and I are co-authors of *ANOTHER 95*. No book, other than *the* Book, is without impurities. I – the unfinished and inept *me* – take responsibility for any and all mistakes, misconceptions, oversights, and lack of both candor and tact. The Lord Jesus - *The Great Reformer* and "head of the church" and "captain of salvation" - authored all true and graceful portions.

May God give the reader discernment to separate the impure from the pure, my weak assumptions from His noble insights. And if you solely credit our Lord Jesus for any recovery recovered and freedom attained, we stand together.

INTRODUCTION

ANOTHER 95: Another 95 Theses For Another Reformation is an amplification of my *95 Theses* published in two newspapers in Kelowna, B.C. This is a brief account leading to that publication….

While attending a conference, during corporate worship, the Lord 'spoke' unexpectedly. I discerned He wanted me to relay insights He had deposited over the years to evangelicals back home in Kelowna, utilizing the local newspapers.

Evangelicalism is found wanting. Reformation of the evangelical's heart will only come via outsiders; insiders have forfeited extensive opportunities. (It must be quickly said that not everyone attending evangelical services is an evangelical, though most are.) Many evangelicals are insulated from alternative perspectives by lords of the pulpits and a herd mentality. Purchasing newspaper space to preach reformation might be a violation against religious protocol, but such honored decorum means nothing to "the head of the church".

"Yes, Lord, I will do it."

I discerned this project was not for the moment, but I was to consider the matter seriously, and be prayerful and careful. About a year and a half later, I felt the stirring of the Holy Spirit; the time was drawing near.

While considering how to package my message I happened to pick up a book I had written many years ago, *Financing the Great Commission*. The back cover included these words: *In 1517 Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of catholicism. It was a shaft of reason challenging a mentality that threatened to snuff out any dignity and freedom which may have survived that very dark age.* While reading, I felt a flutter, a witness, of the Holy Spirit.

I will compile my own 95 theses!

I immediately began writing….

A Challenge to Evangelicals, Etcetera.

Etcetera? Etcetera is everyone. Non-evangelicals, all christians, non-believers… everyone. But these 95 theses are especially directed to evangelicals. I define an evangelical as one attached to an evangelical church, one who believes in the born-again experience, one attesting to the inerrancy of the Bible.

Theses *is the plural of* thesis*. A thesis is a proposition or statement to be considered, discussed and possibly disputed. Martin Luther wrote his famous "95 Theses" in 1517, a challenge to accepted religious beliefs and practices of that day. Evangelicals consider him to be a hero of the faith.*

My "95 Theses", interesting to most and relevant to all, are my opinions regarding certain spiritual matters for the reader's consideration. This compilation of reflections and teachings is the result of 37 years of christianity, many of those years lived within evangelical influence. Hopefully they will stimulate many conversations. Certainly there will be a response from several pulpits.

I divided my 95 theses, listed on the back pages of this book, into eleven sections.

I supposed there would be a dissenting reflex from many christian readers - *Church affairs should not be discussed publicly before the secular world!* – and I hurriedly responded to this supposed objection thus: *Jesus proclaimed truth – the good and the ugly – before the religious society and the secular.* And: *Obscurity corrodes the good; transparency reforms the defective.*

And while writing I was sensitive to the majority of readers who had not received Christ as Lord and Savior, and included such verses as John 3:16 and 17. I was confident my *95 Theses* would be a draw toward Christ's salvation, not an aversion. I addressed the last eight theses to "The Non-christian".

On June 24th, 2009, both *The Daily Courier* and the *Capital News* of Kelowna, B.C. printed and distributed my *95 Theses*. *ANOTHER 95:* Another 95 Theses For Another Reformation is an amplification of each of the 95 theses.

T H E S I S # 1: **Truth has never changed, and will never change.**

Though many (most?) are most concerned with truths that don't matter much, spiritual truth is relevant to all. It's that kind of truth this thesis is referencing.

Truth can't change because it's unchangeable. The truth about God, man, angels, salvation, heaven and hell, though beyond our ability to fully understand, is steadfast and immovable, more so than that great rock man has named Gibraltar.

Everything tangible on planet earth is changing – teens evolve into adults, Mom will soon be Grandma, the house across the street will look much different in a hundred years, trees grow, flowers fade, iron rusts. And most intangibles are susceptible to change - determination dwindles, love is fickle, faith fades, emotions bounce. But truth (that is, spiritual truth) is a foundation that can be confidently built upon.

Truth will not fade, nor flee, nor blow away, nor self-destruct. It will be here in all our tomorrows in its original state. Truth is as unchanging as God…. because God *is* truth. Yes, as "God is love", so God is truth. Our Father is truth, the Lord Jesus is truth, and "the Spirit of truth" is truth. As God cannot change and become someone different than who He is, truth cannot change and become different than what it is.

Even non-spiritual truth (if there is such a thing) changes not. A thousand years ago two plus two equaled four; today two plus two equals four. Forever gravity will pull down, never up. Forever H2 plus O = water.

Truth is as it always was, and it will always be unchanging. Before we were, God was good; eons from now God will be good. Truth is something everyone can build their lives upon. It will not crumble, it will not devalue. Truth is not like the impregnable fortress that was conquered, nor like the unsinkable ship that sunk, nor the unbeatable team soundly skunked. Mightier than lies, more powerful than a tsunami, brighter than sunshine, truth will not go down.

This thesis - truth will never change - is solace for the thinking person. Forever we can find refuge in the unfailing consistency of truth.

T H E S I S # 2

Spiritual truth is available. God dispenses truth generously. We each have the amount of truth desired; had we wanted more we would have more; had we wanted less we would have less.

The governor who asked our Jesus, "What is truth?" should have stayed around long enough for the answer. ("When had said this, he went out again.")

Lord Jesus is responsive to the seeker of truth. He taught truth, He preached truth, He prophesied truth, He defended truth, He demonstrated truth, He exemplified truth, He *was* truth. But Pilate didn't want truth, not sufficiently.

As His love and as His truth, God's generosity is an unfailing wonder. Previous to sending His Son to preach truth, His love compelled Him to send prophets to proclaim His words, knowing most would reject those life-giving words, knowing His sent-ones would encounter the wrath of the controllers.

And before Lord Jesus ascended He commissioned the eleven to take spiritual truth to the nations, and by His Spirit He has prepared and commissioned preachers to relay the wisdom and salvation of our God to each and every generation. Yes, spiritual truth is available. Yes, God dispenses truth generously.

Pilate obviously pondered that question - "What is truth?" - prior to his encounter with *The Divine*. Pilate's problem is our problem: We want more, but we don't want more enough to get more than what we have. Yes, we wanted more more than Pilate wanted more; the poor guy didn't have sufficient truth to save him from eternal perdition, and we did. (A good time to say, "Thanks be to God!!")

But when we get to that secure place we are now headed, oh how we will wish we had accepted more of God's truth, and this includes those who have more than most. Understand that having truth isn't knowing truth or understanding truth. Having truth is *embracing* known truth. It is truth we build our lives upon, this by God's grace.

While we will regret truth ignored, we will rejoice over truth embraced. More truth, more rejoicing. Less truth, less rejoicing. All will be eternally wealthy, but some wealthier than others. That's the way it works.

Because we have been given "the Spirit of truth", spiritual truth is as available as He is. This Sent-one is eager to impart truth to sent-ones, to "he who has ears to hear". But He is limited by our free will. The closed heart gets nothing, the fearful heart and the divided heart get little, the receptive heart gets some, the hungry heart gets more, and the desperate heart gets much.

We each have the amount of truth desired. Exactly.

T H E S I S # 3

Resisting truth is resisting God, the giver of truth. Resisting truth hardens the heart and brings alarming consequences.

Rejecting a gift is rejecting the gift giver. Truth is a gift and truth is free and truth is never harmful. Yet the wide "highway to hell" (NLT) affirms that most reject God and truth leading to God.

Do born-again evangelicals on "the way that leads to life" also reject truth?

Perhaps it would be kinder to say evangelicals often *resist* truth that opposes traditional perspective. And if pressed (which they should never be), they will change the subject rather than outright reject Biblical truth.

But isn't this dishonest?

Yes.

Every evangelical?

An evangelical, to remain an evangelical, must compromise. But before going further, let's define an evangelical….

An evangelical is not an evangelical because he/she regularly attends an evangelical church. (Yet most who do are.) Some attend because there is nowhere else to go, and it's lonely out there. These faithful soldiers manage to protect their hearts from being overwhelmed by a system at variance with *The Word* (the Bible). Perhaps it's fair to say a true evangelical is one intentionally blind to the unpleasant realities of evangelicalism, one loyal to and spiritually attached to an evangelical church; this would certainly include church members and tithers.

How does resisting truth harden the heart?

As surely as iron rusts, hearts harden. Both are natural phenomena down here. If iron is maintained, it will not rust; if one's heart is maintained, it will not harden. Christ is the keeper of the christian's heart, this only by his/her cooperation. Only Lord Jesus can keep the heart lithe and pliable. Resisting "the Spirit of truth" who "will guide you into all truth" is resisting Christ. Not wise. Not healthy.

Does this prevent the evangelical from bearing fruit?

Prevent?…. no. Hinder?…. definitely.

Evangelicals bear good fruit. Perhaps their yield in North America and elsewhere is greater than all other christian groups combined, simply because of their number and because they are less bound by tradition than mainline protestants. However, the evangelical rebellious to truths of *The Word* is majorly handicapped. She is the tennis player with broken strings in her racquet. He's the guy bouncing a partially deflated basketball. She's the customer served a tough steak with a dull knife. He's the fellow in the boat trying to row with one oar.

But alarming consequences? Really?

Really.

Evangelicals rarely mention the upcoming "judgment seat of Christ" which will reveal the quality of our earthly service, be it "gold, silver, precious stones" or "wood, hay, straw". Perhaps most intuitively know that will not be a cheerful day, and simply avoid the subject. Eternal rewards that could have been minus eternal rewards received will equal eternal losses. And resisting truth results in much sadder repercussions….

Evangelicals, as every christian, affect others. We influence more than we think. We are walking, breathing epistles preaching a message of one brand or another. We all affect the final tally of both heaven and hell. "Gold, silver, precious stones" result in people being rescued; "wood, hay, straw" result in people *not* being rescued.

THESIS # 4

Truth, when proclaimed, is powerful, much more so than untruth.

There is sad, there is very sad, and there is very, very sad. Very, very sad is the evangelical - that is, the typical evangelical who has sentenced him/herself to an evangelical pew - having truth and not proclaiming it.

Pews, though somewhat convenient and comfortable, reek with false, crippling inferences. In time they will make a husband less of a husband, a father less of a father, a man and woman less than half a disciple of Christ.

Pew people are the product of pulpit people. The few fashion the many. And the many have not been fashioned to proclaim truth.

Pew people, when not in their pew, talk lots and say little. Someone has rightly observed we are comforted by the sound of our own voice. Evangelical does not know he/she has been called and commissioned to preach by no lesser than "the head of the church". She contains more truth than the proclaimer, John, the forerunner of Christ. He knows what the eleven knew. She understands the gospel message. He is aware of the plight of the lost. Yet he/she is, mostly, silent. Very, very sad.

Untruth is also powerful, though much less so. Proclaimers of untruth – distortions, exaggerations, misconceptions - far outnumber those of truth, and are less timid to preach their gospel. Truth proclaimed is required to undo the effects of untruth proclaimed.

To be effective, truth must be said. To be more effective, truth must be said often. When truth and untruth do battle, truth will be the victor. Because truth is the "two-edged sword".

"Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

THESIS # 5

Jesus proclaimed truth – the good and the ugly – before the religious society and the secular. Withholding spiritual truth can be immoral.

When our Lord spoke publicly he wasn't concerned about who was in His audience. He let truth fly unfettered, no apologies, no disclaimers. Those having "ears to hear" caught His life-giving words. Those who hadn't were offended and critical. That's the way it was and the way it is. So be it.

Lord Jesus was not 'seeker sensitive'; He was Father sensitive, speaking the words given Him by His Sender. Truth is in agreement with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit thoroughly anoints truth-words. The Three ministered truth in unison.

The crowds were a mixture, including Roman soldiers who were everywhere, nervous controllers

hoping to entrap the uncredentialed Teacher, many in need of physical healing, the curious, the "poor in spirit", both the meek and proud, the hungry and critical. He spoke truth to all because all deserve truth, even those who would reject it. An anointed word of truth is a "two-edged sword" that can cut down a misconception, the pet implement of our common enemy.

If nice people say only nice things, Lord Jesus wasn't nice. If sensitive people say only what doesn't offend, our precious Lord was most insensitive. He spoke truth – the good and the ugly. He called the "scribes and Pharisees" hypocrites because they were. He called Herod a fox because Herod was a fox.

Withholding spiritual truth can be immoral, but not always. To be silent is sometimes sin and sometimes wisdom. We have all been guilty of not saying what should be said, and saying what shouldn't.

The evangelical way, it seems, is to offend no one, preserve the unity, be 'christian'. If you don't agree, insinuate you do. Discretion can be good, but too much of a good thing isn't. It's like a small scoop of ice cream smothered in delicious, gooey sauce, enough to cover a large cake. Too much is too much.

There is nothing wrong with, "I see it differently", or "I have another perspective". If he disagrees, don't love him less. Never argue. Do not waste your insights on unreasonable people.

We owe them the truth, those who don't have it. "Freely you have received, freely give." Do not assume public preaching is for others only. Consider: Your prime example, the Lord Jesus, was a public speaker.

Our religious population, this most definitely including born-again evangelicals, needs serious alignment by someone courageous to speak truth in a forthright manner. Many have to be set free from their manipulators, stern and inflexible guardians of *the way it is* (See note.), so they can be free to choose "the way, the truth, and the life" as their life.

To fulfill their commission, to "fight the good fight of faith", to "bear much fruit", the saved must be saved from misconceptions. To withhold truth for the sake of some or for fear of controllers of *the way it is*, is immoral. To offend many for the sake of a few, even one, is just.

Note: *The way it is* is established tradition. The Way It Is is also a book (available free at www.larryjones.ca). The expression *the way it is* is used intermittently throughout *Another 95*, and is always italicized.

T H E S I S # 6

Jesus wants His church to be transparent. Obscurity corrodes the good; transparency reforms the defective.

In the secular world obscurity corrodes. In the church obscurity corrodes.

In Canada, Members of Parliament blessed themselves with an exorbitant pension plan, better than almost all taxpayers. Very few canadians know they pay six dollars for every MP's one dollar contribution. (In the private sector the common rate is one-to-one.) Further, the guaranteed (!) profit on the investment of their pension funds is more than ten percent per annum, resulting in an actual cost of twenty-three dollars for the taxpayer for every dollar the politician pays. (See note # 1.)

The ruling class, whoever and wherever, often provide themselves with extravagant benefits and perks. They take better care of themselves than those they serve. Obscurity works well for them.

In Christ's church there is a ruling class; controllers, not the Lord Jesus, made it so.

Most churches, evangelical and otherwise, are divided into two groups which could be referred to as the ministerial (or clergy) and the laity (laymen). (Or the controllers and the controlled. Or the credentialed and the non-credentialed. Or the salaried and the unsalaried. Or the titled and the non-titled.) These two groups could also be categorized as pulpit people and pew people.

In many stores there is a dark glass window whereby workers in the office can see you but you can't see them. Behind that glass there's a lot of business happenings, decisions being made, and people giving undetected oversight to shoppers, especially alert for shoplifters. Metaphorically, that same glass separates pulpit people from pew people. It's easy for pulpit people to monitor the lives of pew people, but difficult for pew people to observe pulpit people. This one-sided obscurity gives leverage to those in leadership.

In a pastor-layman relationship leverage naturally tilts to the pastor. The pastor is significant, the layman comparatively insignificant. (See note # 2.) The layman comes to the pastor; the pastor doesn't come to him. The pastor is the understanding father; the layman is the son in need of validation. The one is practiced at managing people, the warm and generous teacher quite willing to help his struggling pupil. The layman will often need the pastor's endorsement, the pastor doesn't need his. Esteem and trust flow in one direction, patience and magnanimity the other. (See note # 3.)

Because of the one-sided obscurity, and because of the unhealthy, lopsided (and non-Scriptural) relationship between pulpit people and pew people, there is constant danger of abuse. Shepherds can (and often do) fleece the naïve sheep unnoticed. Yes, unnoticed. It is not uncommon for a congregation of mostly five-figure annual wage earners to unknowingly pay the pulpit people a six-figure salary.

If pew people were given special glasses to see through that darkened window, they would be surprised (shocked?) to know 'they' are no more spiritual that 'us'. Sure, they have heard of the occasional pastor falling into adultery, but they have no idea just how frequent adultery (etcetera) occurs among the licensed and titled (perhaps equal to that of the non-licensed and non-titled). Emotional breakdown among pulpit people is more common than most are aware. As is

dysfunctional family life, divorce, addiction to drugs and alcohol and pornography. As is jealousy and resentment and unforgiveness. As is loneliness and discouragement and unbelief. As is competition for larger congregations.

Those in leadership are more knowledgeable of the Bible, but not necessarily more faithful to Christ. In unison they protect and fortify another way. (No serious student of *The Word* would conclude that evangelicalism is in harmony with New Testament writings.) In unison they hide behind that dark glass, pretending all is better than it is. In unison they maneuver pew people into submission to their denominational/ecclesiastical lords, and away from the lordship of Jesus. In a dispute, leadership often puts the welfare of fellow shepherds above that of the sheep – while other shepherds say and do nothing. (See note # 4.)

There are Scripture verses frozen in fuzziness because pulpit people avoid them. When is the last time you heard, "Freely you have received, freely give"? Subjects such as tithing should be revisited, this time hearing from both sides of the argument, not only from those depending on the tithe for their salary.

There has always been a remedy for dysfunctional evangelicalism: transparency.

Transparency verses obscurity…. it's a grave matter. Obscurity assures abuse. Which hinders the Holy Spirit. Which lessens the power of any church. Which (please get this) results in heaven being less populated.

Transparency assures little or no abuse. Which unfetters the Holy Spirit. Which keeps the church strong. Which (please get this) results in heaven being more populated.

Note # 1: This information supplied by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation

Note # 2: I asked a friend if he remembered playing badminton with me about thirty years ago, a one-time occasion; understandably he didn't. I then asked if he remembers playing badminton with the pastor of our church previous to playing with me, also a one-time occasion; he did.

Note # 3: Please pardon the needful generalities.

Note # 4: Many righteous, unselfish men and women are pulpit people. But the same is true of pew people. After some contemplation, I made a list of the top twenty people who I have known personally over four decades of christianity, whose spirituality I most admired. Of the twenty, four are licensed.

T H E S I S # 7

Christ commissioned His church to proclaim the truth about Himself and the salvation He provides.

It is not wrong to ask the obvious question: *Is Christ's church proclaiming "Jesus Christ and Him*

crucified" in a manner that could be considered adequate?

Lord Jesus, our prime example, was "gentle and lowly in heart", and yet He asked questions. He challenged. He corrected. Being humble is not being agreeable for the sake of being agreeable. Not only is that distasteful, but possibly nothing less than disloyalty to "the head of the church".

Responsible sons and daughters of the living God are not get-along people. While something is wrong with the one who can't get along with anyone, there is likewise something amiss with the one compatible to everybody. Lack of conflict could indicate lack of conviction. And lack of courage.

95 Theses was written for the purpose of reformation of His church, and such a question (top paragraph) needs to be asked. Reformation is reforming the heart and mind, where necessary, bringing both into alignment to *The Word* and will and dictates of God the Father, His Son and our Savior, and the most Holy Spirit. The otherwise, *the way it is* remaining *the way it is*, is unacceptable to the responsible, thinking son/daughter concerned with Christ's Great Commission to His church.

So, regarding the Great Commission, just how is *the way it is*?

To know, look around. It's okay to look around. Martin Luther looked around. Responsible christians look around, comparing what they see and hear to *The Word*. Take note. What do you see His church doing? What do you hear His church saying?

To know evangelicalism, simply peek into the life of Typical Evangelical.

Excluding the twenty-two minutes of praise and worship before the collection of 'tithes and offerings', and excluding the 'In Jesus name. Amen' at the end of grace before supper and other prayers, it is possible (likely?) Typical Evangelical will not speak *The Name* in an entire day. In an entire week. And yes, in an entire month. Even though he/she associates with fellow evangelicals mostly. (See note.)

Evangelicals, you may observe, are *God* people. Paul and John and Peter were *God* people and *Christ* people. Evangelicals are not ashamed of God; the three were not ashamed of Christ. We are not commissioned to preach *God*; we are commissioned to preach "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". Jesus preached *Jesus* mostly. The three (etcetera) preached *Jesus* mostly. Today's pulpiteer preaches *God* mostly, dutifully throwing in a little *Jesus*.

When looking around, pay attention to the subjects that fascinate christians. It's this and that and whatever and whoever. It's church happenings and church politics and church leaders and church doctrine. It's the apostolic movement, the prophetic movement, the charismatic movement, the whatever movement. It's about doing and going and prospering and hoping. It's about issues and problems and solutions and opinions. But it's not, primarily, about Him. No, not at all. The commissioned are talkative, but the subject isn't "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". Christ's commission is not an urgency.

Evangelicalism is certainly not a Christ-less christianity, but neither is it a Christ-centered christianity. It's somewhere in between. Thankfully "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" *is* preached within evangelicalism, perhaps more than other christian factions. And thankfully evangelicalism does evangelize. There *is* a beep on the heart monitor. And yet evangelicalism is a poor investment, of finances and energy, for those wanting a reasonable return.

You have heard it said, "We are the church." That being so, *you* are the church. And thesis # 7 should be taken very seriously. Please read it again. And again. Because the job just isn't getting done, not satisfactorily, not comprehensively, not with determined effort.

The lost are rescued by preaching to the lost. And the lost are rescued by preaching to the church. As a Christ-centered man will surely reproduce, a Christ-centered church will surely reproduce.

You can turn the attention of Christ's church unto Christ by simply talking Christ. Expressions of gratitude and awe unto your Sin-bearer will do much, and preaching "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" will do more.... be it over coffee, over the phone, over the neighbor's fence, or over a pulpit. You can make use of e-mail or snail-mail (postal), the internet social networking, your own website, the local newspaper, tracts, whatever (as, and only as, the Holy Spirit directs).

Note: This doesn't include new converts; evangelicalism requires time to replace the lordship of Christ with the lordship of itself. And it doesn't include non-evangelicals attending evangelical services.

T H E S I S # 8

Evangelicals have always declared Scripture, the original writings, to be true.

The Bible is true because "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God".

Several books have been written to convince the reasonable that the Bible, the original writings, is indeed accurate and divine. One such book is "Evidence That Demands a Verdict" by Josh McDowell.

McDowell, when a college student, didn't like most christians. ("I thought that if a Christian had a brain cell, it would die of loneliness.") He considered the christian claim, that the Bible is God's infallible word to man, ludicrous, and being a dutiful skeptic he studied the Bible for ammunition to humiliate the christian claiming this book deserved special status. But the skeptic was in for a major setback, a gratifying setback leading to his conversion to the Lord Jesus. His ardent studies eventually resulted in the mentioned book, a rather thickish book because of the extensive compilation of evidence. Reading McDowell's insights and stack of evidence will warm and strengthen the christian's heart.

Truth gets into us two ways, through the intellect and by the "Spirit of truth". Finding truth by the Spirit is like searching for a heater in a dark room - the closer you get the warmer it feels. Those wanting truth sufficiently will find truth because the "Spirit of truth" is wanting to impart truth. Many

have been converted to our precious Savior after hearing the simple gospel; it just felt right.

The many truths contained in the Bible, though equally true, are not equally relevant. Mark records "one of the rulers of the synagogue…. Jairus by name" begged Jesus, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her that she may be healed." Mark further records someone telling Jairus, "Your daughter is dead." Jesus said to the distraught dad, "Do not be afraid; only believe." And Jesus, accompanied by "Peter, James, and John", went to Jairus' house and told "those who wept and wailed loudly" that the "child is not dead, but sleeping". "And they laughed Him to scorn." "Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her…. 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.' Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age."

This account contains many truths: a man by the name of Jairus had a twelve-year-old daughter…. Jairus was a religious ruler…. the daughter was critically sick and died…. Peter and James and John accompanied Jesus to Jairus' house…. there was a crowd of mourners who ridiculed Jesus. All these truths, though fully true, were much less significant and relevant than the truth "the girl arose" from death.

There is a subject in the Bible of *primary relevance*, and given *primary attention*. What is that dominant subject…. ?

Obviously, thou thinkest, *the primary subject of the Bible is God…. omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, merciful, loving God.* Not so.

Perhaps then, thou thinkest again, *the primary subject is man…. created by God "in Our image, according to Our likeness", an account of fallen and sinful man in major crisis.* Not so again.

The primary subject (the prime truth) of our Bible is not Him, God, nor him, man, but them, God *and* man.

The preeminent theme of Scripture is *the relationship* between Creator and His special creation. It's a beautiful story that turns into a sad story. For some, the story turns beautiful again. But not all, not most.

The story begins, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"…. resulting in Adam. Adam was more than a zookeeper's pet, he was the apple of God's eye. They communicated, fellowshipped, shared. It was a rich relationship. God and man very together, very satisfied. It was a *trust* relationship, founded on mutual trust; God trusted the man, and the man trusted his God.

And then, "It is not good for man to be alone"…. resulting in Eve. Eve was planet earth's first idol (an idol being first love), first of thousands. Idols of various types were always a curse to Adam's offspring, making an idol of things that breathe and things that don't.

That Eve was indeed an idol is proven by the fact that, squeezed to choose between God and God's blessing, Adam chose Eve. Yes, he dearly loved God, but he also dearly loved his "bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh"; wife was lovely, and wife was keen, and wife was sensuous. Jesus taught we love the one we obey. ("He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.")

And so relationship was severed. Trust, the foundation of healthy relationships, was seriously damaged. God and man were now disconnected, *un*-connected. Sin, while seriously damaging man's love for God, never affected God's love for man. Because God "hates divorce", restoration of relationship was (and is) imperative. Pursuit of man began immediately, this without coercion, always honoring the free will that is a key element of God's design of man.

So the Old and New Testaments contain true accounts of pursuit, Creator constantly pursuing His creation, and the occasional creation (heroes of the faith) pursuing his/her Maker.

The highly relevant truth that God is *now* pursuing us through Christ and Christ is *now* pursuing us through His most Holy Spirit, the truth that God *covets* the trust relationship originally intended - yes, nothing less than an intimate Father-son/Father-daughter relationship - should motivate us to reciprocate with passion and gratitude.

T H E S I S # 9

The Bible claims itself to be God's written word, fully true. David: The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. (Ps.12:6)

Silver was heated over hot flames "in a furnace of earth" to burn off impurities, and after seven such treatments the silver was purified. David considered "the words of the Lord" to be equally pure.

Only the Lord's words are infallible words. Christ's saints often package His truths in their own words, and when such words do not conflict with His truths they are equally pure. But….

But christians are simply incapable of consistently expressing truth accurately. Evidence of this sad reality abounds….

Tithing is a good example.

Though the Bible never teaches or encourages the New Covenant believer to tithe, and though there is ample evidence within New Testament writings to indicate tithing is contrary to the heart of our God, many expounders within evangelicalism vigorously espouse the tithe. A non-tither in most evangelical churches is tolerated, not embraced, and chances of him/her advancing into a place of influence are slim to none.

If tithing really is just plain wrong, the insistence by many writers (over the centuries!) is proof that man's words are often in opposition to God's words. (See note # 1.)

Tithing is but one in a long list of subjects of disagreement within evangelicalism. In a room of a hundred learned writers none would find agreement on all issues with the other ninety-nine, because….

Because unlike the Lord Jesus, and unlike Adam and Eve before sin, and unlike angels, and unlike all heaven's inhabitants, *christians are partial.*

Book writers, it seems, usually write within acceptable boundaries (a reason why more do not decry the evangelical tithing mandate and many etceteras so harmful to Christ's church). Boundaries - set by denominations, local churches, friends, colleagues, spouses, etcetera - are unwritten, but real. A man writes with pen in hand and fences in mind. Being accepted trumps being true. Like every believer, writers can be infected with a fear of man that keeps them in line with *the way it is*. Christians, with very few exceptions, really are partial.

Francis Asbury, a circuit rider during the American Revolution, requested permission from John Wesley (the famous writer/preacher) to baptize his new converts because the war prevented a Wesley representative from travelling from England to the United States. Permission was denied. If Asbury were impartial, he would simply have investigated New Testament writings and determined that all believers are equally free to baptize. But no, the converts to Christ were denied water baptism.

Christians of all generations have a history of partiality. (See note # 2.) Having heroes (and lords) can engender partiality, giving more consideration to the insights of some than others.

The one who is partial is not led by the Holy Spirit, not fully, perhaps not primarily.

The best of books are not flawless because writers are flawed. Only a pure heart can write a pure book. Book writers are purveyors of both truth and untruth. As cargo travels from province to province by way of the train, untruth travels through sequential generations via books. (That's why today, for example, a christian with cancer is so infected because of the sovereignty of God!)

To be fully managed by the Holy Spirit (who "will guide you into all truth") one must be firmly attached to (fully devoted to) the Lord Jesus Christ. The characteristic dearth of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" in writers' material indicates poverty of relationship between Lord Jesus and writers.

Christianity would be healthier if most books in your favorite christian bookstore were never written, though all contain degrees of truth and relevance. Don't be beguiled; a book can declare many truths and yet be a false teaching. Anything 'christian' that is acceptable in non-christian circles probably isn't. Many books ignore, even negate, Christ and His Calvary, preaching instead the world's cures…. sprinkled with a few Bible verses to give credibility.

And yet it would certainly be unwise to disregard all books (a mistake akin to avoiding all preachers). The Lord Jesus Christ gave us the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, *who often communicate via books*, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine". (Ephesians, chapter 4)

Perhaps every book, the Bible the only exception, is a mixture of truth and less-than-truth. We would be wise to seek the Holy Spirit while choosing reading material, and be cognizant that all books of all generations were built by frail men, themselves influenced by frail men. We enter a book, not alone, but with "the Teacher", the Lord Jesus. We must develop "ears to hear" what "the Spirit of the Lord" Jesus is saying to us.

There is in our possession a book of truth. Truth is valuable, and *The Word* should be considered a treasure. The Bible is God's compilation of "pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times". It is 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. (See note # 3.)

Note # 1: Reading *Financing the Great Commission*, chapters two and three, available at larryjones.ca will convince most that tithing is not a New Covenant requirement.

Note # 2: *Francis Asbury: God's circuit Rider*, by Charles Ludwig.

Note # 3: This last sentence is a quote from *A Catholic No More* (available at larryjones.ca).

T H E S I S # 10

Jesus often quoted the Old Testament; His quotations are His endorsement. Jesus appealed to Scripture to prove Himself to be the long awaited Messiah ("The Scriptures…. testify of Me."); this appeal is His endorsement. Scripture is as true as Jesus is true.

Jesus was the only *true* person since the fall. You are not true, I am not true, nor are he or she or they. Being true is speaking truth (this in reference to spiritual truth) consistently and accurately, with no impurities to debase.

Our Lord Jesus alone occupied this place of purity of expression.

The rest of us are not there and won't be there until we're up there.

We are not true, nor are we honest (we do not speak inconvenient truths). We tend to boast our strengths instead of confessing our weaknesses. We know we appear to be what we are not, and we like it that way, no reason to correct their misconception. So we mask our venerable masks before walking out the door.

And what we do individually we do corporately.

Together we pretend. The congregation hides from outsiders its internal conflicts and dearth of spirituality. And denominations? A denomination is but a gigantic, political conglomerate of congregations. Graduates entering leadership make an unspoken pact with their lords to protect *the*

way it is; their religious ambitions will never be fulfilled without the endorsement of those who molded them.

There is a dishonesty that weaves throughout evangelicalism, touching all parts. If all, even some, 'Reverends' were candid, *Another 95* would never have been required.

Appearance is a god of the world and a god of christianity. How we appear to be, individually and corporately, is more paramount than what we are. But reality exhorts us, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (There is no need for self-reprimanding…. falling short is to be expected; it's simply what we do.)

But not so our Christ.

Jesus Christ was the "lamb without blemish and without spot"; if He were less His sacrifice of Himself would have been insufficient. A "lamb without blemish" speaks truth only. In "our great God and savior Jesus Christ" there was no impurity of deed or word. He said plainly, "I am…. the truth".

Not only was (is) Lord Jesus true, he was honest. No pretence. No mask. No double standard. No political correctness, often saying what His friends and enemies didn't want to hear. He took on *the way it is*. He called the hypocrites hypocrites and thieves thieves.

If we believe the words of "the truth" are true, we will be sufficiently impacted by Thesis # 10. "The truth" would never publicly read from, and thereby endorse, an Old Testament book that was not truthful….

Luke 4:17- 21: *And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:*

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Then He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Lord Jesus thus certified the book of Isaiah. It's as if He declared, "I certify as true this book!"

But how can a book written by a mere man be true? The answer is found in 2 Timothy 3:16: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*

Our Lord also quoted from Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Micah, Zechariah, and Malachi, likewise confirming these nine books.

Our Jesus endorsed several other Old Testament books by simply referencing them. He spoke of Sodom and Gomorrah found in Genesis, circumcision - as God instructed Moses in Leviticus, the

"serpent in the wilderness" in Numbers, David eating "the showbread" in 1 Samuel, Elijah's widow in 1 Kings, Naaman the leper in 2 Kings, and "the sign of Jonah" in the book of Jonah.

Also, New Testament writers, most being Christ's apostles, often quoted from or referenced Old Testament books, further authenticating them. Of the thirty-nine 'Old' books, almost all were referenced by either Lord Jesus or 'New' writers.

And now the New Testament.

Are New Testament writings equally true and reliable? "Come now, and let us reason together"….

The church has for many centuries discerned the New Testament to be equal to the Old in trueness and reliability.

Deuteronomy 7:6: *For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*

God gave His "holy people" the Old Testament.

1 Peter 2:9: *You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.*

That's us. It seems reasonable that God would give His church, His equally "holy people", His equally "special treasure", a *new* testament. The Old was centered on the *coming* Christ; a New was required to pronounce and accentuate the *arrived* Christ.

As the first "holy people" correctly discerned the trueness of the Old thirty-nine books, it is reasonable to assume God's equally "holy people" (the church), could rightly discern the trueness of the New twenty-seven books. They got it right and so did we.

The New is in agreement with the Old. Much of what was prophesied in the Old has been fulfilled and recorded in the New - such as: Christ's virgin birth, the town of His birth, His flight to Egypt when a Babe, His years in Nazareth, John His forerunner proclaiming "prepare the way of the Lord", His healing miracles, His betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, the casting of lots for His clothes, offering Him vinegar on the cross, His burial with the rich, and His ascending into heaven. (Other prophecies, many regarding Christ's return to earth, are yet to be fulfilled.)

When Jesus said, "The Scriptures…. testify of Me", He was speaking of, and inadvertently endorsing, the Old, all thirty-nine books. Would He today similarly endorse the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, since they, too, testify of Him in the same manner? Millions worldwide - from every nation and culture, and from every day of every decade of every century since Calvary - who experienced a born-again transformation of their lives after hearing the simple New Testament gospel would undoubtedly agree their Christ would likewise endorse the New Testament.

T H E S I S # 11

Jesus taught the life built upon His words will be successful. And Jesus taught the life not built upon His words will be disastrous. (Mt.7:24-27) Solomon: He who despises the word will be destroyed. (Pr.13:13)

Matthew 7:24-27: *"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."

An evangelical is "a wise man who his house on the rock". And an evangelical is "a foolish man who his house on the sand". In some ways he is wise, in other ways he is foolish. He will be rewarded for his wisdom and "suffer loss" for his foolishness because….

As "the floods came", so "the judgment seat of Christ" is coming.

The guy who thought the flood would never come, who figured he could save money by building on sand instead of digging down to the rock, was wrong. Floods come eventually and unexpectedly. We take turns having "times of trouble".

Evangelicals avoid, mostly, the subject of our impending judgment whereby our obedience will earn us rewards, eternal rewards, and our disobedience will result in loss, eternal loss. Nervous evangelicals no more want to hear of the approaching "that Day" than the nervous builder wants to hear about a flood.

Like the catholic who builds, *mostly*, on the sand of tradition, the evangelical likewise builds, *in part*, on that same sand. Both proclaim infallibility of the Bible, but neither give full allegiance. The catholic knows the Lord Jesus instructed, "Call no man father", and the evangelical can easily deduce that if people had called religious overlords 'Pastor' instead of 'Father', Christ would have likewise forbidden it.

To understand the evangelical heart the reader must accept a very inconvenient reality: on many issues, *it just doesn't matter what the Bible says!*

Again: On many issues, *it just doesn't matter what the Bible says!*

When Bible and traditions collide, and the evangelical is forced to choose, often (usually?) he will set his loyalty upon traditional position rather than *The Word*. That's why he will continue to call the man, 'Pastor'. He accepts a temporary reward - the endorsement of man - and suffers eternal loss.

It just doesn't matter what the Bible says! is a strong statement. Perhaps an *over*statement?

Perhaps not.

Let's step back, way back, where we can get an overall perspective of evangelicalism….

Evangelicalism consists of *thousands* of denominations (and affiliations), some birthed centuries ago, others recently. All have one thing in common: Each is right in its own estimation.

But none are 'right', though each contains much truth. All are both right and wrong. Their disagreements cause them to look upon each other with suspicion. Not one denomination has been built entirely on the rock of Christ's sayings. The construction of any and every denomination requires much adding to and subtracting from New Testament writings. To fulfill their religious ambitions, the builders of big must compromise *The Word* and convince many to embrace their ambitions.

If the evangelical would visit the catholic church down the street it might bring some clarity to his own religious predicament. Might help her see herself. Might set him free.

Seeing the lady lighting a candle before the statue of the 'Blessed Virgin Mary' could help her see every person can be sincerely wrong. Watching all those people receive God's salvation in the form of a wafer might help him realize millions can error in unity. The purposeful externals – statues, vestments, rituals, and many etceteras – could make her realize the effective externals of evangelicalism – titles, the suit-and-tie, the pulpit, and many etceteras. Witnessing such an abundance of religiosity could help him see the nasty abundance in his own heart. Discerning the catholic heart that places tradition above the Bible could make it easier for her to see the evangelical heart.

Catholicism should convince us that being universal and being historical and being numerous and being powerful and being influential and being endorsed doesn't make wrong right, invalid valid, un-Godly Godly.

So this is one global perspective of evangelicalism: thousands of conflicting evangelical denominations worldwide, each controlling between a few and many evangelical churches, and each church influencing many evangelicals. Each and every evangelical is influenced to build his/her christianity upon both rock and sand, the sayings of Lord Jesus Christ and conflicting sayings.

It may be troubling for some to think the Lord Jesus did not build their beloved denomination/affiliation, but even more troubling to think He did.

Evangelicalism is built upon traditions of sand. There is no Bible precedent for a salaried pastor, nor a board of elders (or board of whatever). Elders, yes; board of elders, no. There is no precedent for denominations with its regional and national directors, its general secretary or superintendent (or

whatever).

And all are unnecessary.

We must learn: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man", for such a man is no longer trusting exclusively in Lord Jesus.

In many ways does the evangelical choose tradition over the Bible, as *Another 95* establishes. Yet there is an obvious alternative to disobedience…. obedience.

For the house owner to raise his house, dig down to the rock and build a proper foundation would be expensive and time-consuming. But it would take only a few minutes for an evangelical (etcetera) to shift his/her life from the sand of tradition onto the rock of Christ's sayings (which includes all Scripture). And it wouldn't cost a nickel.

The first step would be repentance, apologizing to the "head of the church" for betrayal. Repentance is hard, but necessary. The next step would be a recommitment to Lord Jesus Christ, and receiving the fullness of Him in a more serious and sincere manner than ever before. And last, making a full commitment to the Bible, perhaps signing the last page to help seal that commitment. That's it.

Oops! Did I say it wouldn't cost a nickel? Actually, it will cost much, much more than that….

2 Timothy 3:12: *All who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

That's a promise. The reason more christians aren't suffering persecution must be because few "live Godly in Christ Jesus", living in submission to *The Word* alone. Perhaps evangelicals have learned too well the skill of getting along, keeping in step, walking in unity, being a team player.

Commitment to "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" and commitment to His Bible will certainly bring complications. Their warmth will turn to a chill. How dare you refuse to bend your knee to their lords!

And the pulpit guy relocating from sand to rock will lose his job.

Ah, but the rewards! Eternal rewards! The judgment seat of Christ will be a celebration instead of a time of regret and embarrassment.

T H E S I S # 12

Christians are equally free and responsible to preach Bible truths to "the world" and to each other.

If you can accept that *the way it is* within traditional religions is not God's contrivance, and….

If you can accept that *the way it is* within evangelicalism is not God's contrivance, then perhaps….

Perhaps you can accept *the way it is* in your life is not necessarily, not entirely, God's contrivance.

In some truths you have been properly instructed. You have been taught you are justified by the precious and innocent blood of "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world", and indeed you are justified, as if you have never sinned. And it has been explained and sufficiently emphasized you are sanctified unto our God by faith in Jesus Christ, and so you are. And you have been taught you are an actual son/daughter of "our Father in heaven", and that is a blessed truth.

But perhaps you have *not* been taught you are called to be a preacher.

You are called to preach "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" to the secular world and to the church. You may not have the same degree of anointing as Peter and John and Paul (or perhaps you do), but you are called to preach nonetheless. And the anointing will increase with faithfulness.

Perhaps you think *the way it is* is the way it should be, or else it wouldn't be that way. You assume evangelicalism is *the way it is* because God somehow fashioned it to be so. And the pulpit guy is the pulpit guy because our Lord Jesus determined him to be the pulpit guy. Such is a distortion of the sovereignty of God, passed on to you, perhaps inadvertently and perhaps non-verbally, by pulpit guys.

Understandably, you reason, if the "head of the church" made him the pulpit guy, He likewise made you the pew guy. And we all know pew guys are not preachers, right?

1 Thessalonians 1: 8: *From you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.*

"The word of the Lord has sounded forth" from "the church of the Thessalonians", seemingly from all of them, certainly not just a few. Hmmm. Seems they were all preachers.

In your Bible is the phrase "one another", repeated several times. You have heard the preacher say, "Be kind to *one another*, tenderhearted, forgiving *one another*, even as God in Christ forgave you." And perhaps you have heard him exhort, "Be kindly affectionate to *one another* in brotherly love, in honor giving preference to *one another*." And, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love *one another*."

But rarely does the pulpit guy quote the verse, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, *teaching and admonishing one another*." Or, "As each one has received a gift, *minister it to one another*, as good stewards." Or, "Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together…. but *exhorting one another*."

Ephesians 4:12: *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

"Saints" do "the work of ministry" and edify "the body of Christ". And you are a saint by virtue of *The Sacrifice*.

Ephesians 4:16 (NLT): *He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special*

work, it helps the other parts grow, so the whole body is healthy and growing.

You are one of many parts, helping "the other parts grow". "The other parts" grow the same as we all grow, by the ministry of *The Word*. Lord Jesus Christ would have us minister to "one another". "Each part" is called to preach to "each part". That's God's way.

So how does one change from a non-preacher to a preacher?

Two plans for your consideration, Plan A and Plan B….

Plan A:

Apply to the most prominent bible college, even if this means leaving home for a time; the more prominent the school, the more impressive the credential; the more impressive your credential, the more likelihood of some day landing a good-paying position within evangelicalism.

You will need the endorsement of your pastor, not only to be accepted in bible college, but whenever and wherever you apply for a position. This endorsement is a needful key to success. So more than being respectful to the pastor, be *enthused;* any salesman will tell you enthusiasm sells. Let him know you are a loyal subordinate, eager to serve. Volunteer as much as possible. Do not under any circumstance express a doctrinal difference of opinion. Call him "Pastor" at all public gatherings. Better yet, call him "Pastor" at all times; he will like that. Hopefully, all this will result in a flowery recommendation that will prove useful over your career.

When at bible school cooperate, agree, and volunteer. And smile lots; a perpetual smile will enhance your career considerably. Compete for the highest marks; competition is hefty, especially for the better positions. Send out a resume prior to graduation, always including the endorsement of your pastor and endorsements of college staff. (Get as many as possible and choose the most complimentary.)

Be willing to accept a less-than-desirable position to start, but always be alert for a better opening. Continually send updates on your resumes; don't let them forget you're still around. Work hard at improving your pulpit presence. Watch lots of videos of successful television ministers, noting their confidence and authoritative manner. Let your messages be a blend of humor and gravity. And practice preaching at home; preach to anything that moves and anything that doesn't.

Because of your investment of time and money, you will eventually get your pulpit. You will have an audience. You will be influential. But now you must protect what you have earned, and a little compromise may be needful. Be politically correct whenever possible; don't risk your career over trifle matters. Avoid issues of debate and stay within denominational guidelines. (If you are sufficiently sensitive to your denominational lords you may be one someday.) And again, lots of enthusiasm and lots of smiles.

Plan B:

The key to Plan B is found within 2 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV): *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

Now focus on these words: *your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

If these seven words get deep into your understanding…. and your heart…. and your memory…. your entire christianity will be a success, certainly including your preaching ministry.

Spend much time Christ-gazing. Instead of talking to yourself, talk to Him. Consider and reconsider and reconsider again His words. Convince Him you want Him above every and all. (If this advice sounds simple, it's because it is. If it sounds easy, it isn't. It really isn't.)

If you develop a "sincere and pure devotion to Christ" Christ will ooze out of you. You will preach with conviction your *First Love*, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified".

The Lord Jesus Christ, "the lord of the harvest", will use you. How and when and where are His concern. Your place is to be prepared and attentive.

Have a cache of Scripture verses in your memory bank, and let the Holy Spirit bring them out. It's most important to have a right relationship with the Holy Spirit; He is the governor, you are the governed; He is the evangelist, you are His spokesperson. Be on standby with an attitude of expectation and readiness.

Check your heart to make sure it is Lord Jesus you serve and endeavor to please, and not any man. A healthy relationship with "the brethren" will be the fruit of a healthy relationship with your Christ. You seek *His* companionship, *His* ways, *His* will, *His* heart, *His* wisdom, *His* understanding, *His* lordship, *His* approval, *His* direction.

T H E S I S # 13

Each is responsible to evaluate customs and teachings by Bible standards. The person, group or organization one refuses to examine by Bible standards are idols.

If you could somehow go church hopping throughout evangelical church history, visiting local churches in different countries and different ages, you would see mistakes of various magnitude rooted in evangelicalism. Some of those blunders could be categorized as trifle, but many as severely damaging.

Your church hopping would reveal an assortment of comical evangelical peculiarities: preposterous buildings, 'bishops' wearing funny vestments, men on one side of the church and women on the other, evangelicals shunning cars and choosing the horse and buggy, women in head coverings, and many etceteras.

And then there are some not-so-comical traits: forbiddance of preaching outside church buildings,

evangelicals giving homage to evangelicals, outlawing preaching by non-ordained laity, leadership usurping authority of the dad as head of the family, a glut of intellectualism, forbidding speaking in tongues and prophesying, 'apostolic succession', liturgical services, and many etceteras.

You could find yourself in an 18th century congregation that believes God preordains some to go to heaven and all others to go to hell, regardless of their choices. God was the invisible manipulator, and each person the puppet on His strings with no ability to resist His will. (Calvinism is still alive and well in some quarters of evangelicalism.)

In every era evangelicals have coerced evangelicals to compromise their dependence on Christ alone. Controllers have convinced the controlled to pay them homage (and pay them a salary). They imply, *You need our God-given discernment, you can't do christianity without our shepherding. Blah, blah, blah.*

A shipwrecked evangelical washed ashore on an uninhabited tropical island with only his Bible would spiritually prosper, more so than the evangelical pew and pulpit person. Christ really is sufficient. We have become so unnecessarily complex.

Lord Jesus: *Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.* (Luke 18:17)

Children are tricky people. For them, entrance into the kingdom comes easier than for adults. Kids are heart people; adults are head people. Since we became "sons of the kingdom" by becoming childlike, it should be obvious remaining childlike will bring further benefits.

In christianity, simplicity works.

An elderly circuit rider, way back in the 18th century, asked a young man….

"Are you a slave?"

"No, Suh. Used to be. Mastah freed me."

"Where were you born?"

"Fayetteville, North Carolina."

"Do you like to preach?"

"Yes, Suh. God called me to preach and that's what I does!"

"Study a lot?"

"No, Suh! Ain't never learned to read. But I prays a lot!"

The young man soon became more popular than the elderly gentleman. (See note # 1.)

Another story:

Samuel Morris (1872-1893), a black teen, escaped cruel tribal enemies in the western forest of the Ivory Coast. After conversion to the Lord Jesus in a missionary camp Samuel worked his passage to New York. Before arrival of the ship into New York harbor the cruel captain and most of the renegade crew were converted to Christ. (See note # 2.)

In christianity, simplicity works.

There is no need for evangelical oversight. Don't need the reverends, the bishops, the superintendents, the board of elders, the buildings, the crowds. Didn't need them when Christ walked among men and don't need them now. No need to be grounded in most of the issues christian intellectuals use to impressive each other. We only need to be knit to our Lord Jesus Christ and to a few brothers and sisters of like mind. Yes, we make mistakes, but so do the reverends; they have proved that sufficiently. Leaning on them is evidence of not leaning on Him, the Lord Jesus.

Sitting in an evangelical pew somewhere in history, you might conclude all those pew and pulpit guys are victims of their spiritual times, misguided innocents.

Not so. Not so yesterday, not so today.

Lord Jesus: *But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth.*

Lord Jesus: *He dwells with you and will be in you.*

No person submissive to the governance of the Holy Spirit will walk into error. We are misguided when we 'turn off' the Holy Spirit. To our harm we switch channels. Most have been guilty of man-gazing, which leads to man-worship, which leads to submission to man, which leads to embracing man's ways.

Refusing to examine evangelicalism under Bible light is an indication evangelicalism has attained first place, the Bible having become secondary. This is, and always has been, a common crisis.

The heart gone astray is in constant danger.

When evangelicals give themselves over to 'churchianity' (christians being the focus of christians, church societal life having preeminence over the "head of the church", approval of each other of more value than God's approval, unity of "the brethren" of higher priority than "the unity of the Spirit"), they have done themselves dirt. Serious regret is forthcoming.

1 John 5:21: *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

Note # 1: *Francis Asbury: God's Circuit Rider,* Charles Ludwig

Note # 2: Google: Samuel Kaboo Morris

T H E S I S # 14

Faithfulness to Christ is faithfulness to the Bible. Disobedience to the Bible is disobedience to Christ.

To get from unfaithfulness to faithfulness is easy; we simply walk through the *Repentance Door*.

Doors are a marvelous invention. Doors get us from here to there, and when we tire of there the same door gets us back to here. Doors take us to the outside sunshine, and when the weather turns ugly we can return through the same door to our safe and comfy home.

There ought to be a *Door Appreciation Day*. Most of us just take doors for granted, and that ain't right. A *Door Appreciation Day* would remind us how doors add value to our lives. When locked, we feel safe. When open, we get a fresh breeze. Doors keep the cold out and the warm in. A *Door Appreciation Day* would remind us to appreciate this simple but worthy device.

Consider, what good is a garage without a garage door? And consider, what's the use of a safe without a safe door? And consider, how could a fridge keep the butter from melting if not for the fridge door? And consider how expensive the electricity bill would be if there was no oven door on the oven. And consider the lack of privacy in your bathroom if your bathroom were minus a bathroom door.

How safe would you feel in a hotel room if there was no door between you and the hallway? How safe would you feel in a door-less car? Or a door-less elevator? Or a door-less airplane?

Got an untidy room? No problem. Just throw everything in the closet and close that beloved closet door. Neighbors having a noisy party? There's a simple solution – close all the windows and all the doors. Flies getting in? Try closing the screen door.

Yes, someone ought to collect signatures petitioning a national holiday, celebrating *Door Appreciation Day*. The entire world could celebrate doors together because doors are all over the planet – closing, opening, closing, opening, closing, opening, closing, opening – letting people in, letting people out, letting people in, letting people out, letting people in, letting people out.

Now we don't all have the same taste when it comes to doors. Some like white doors, and some like gray doors, and some like yellow doors, and some like green doors, and some like blue doors, and some like black doors, and some like pink doors, and some like purple doors, and some like pastel doors. But let's celebrate diversity – doors of all color - to symbolize our tolerance toward those having different inclinations.

And we can't forget gates. Gates are doors. Farmers and ranchers like gates a lot. Gates keep the public off their land. Gates are handy for letting the horse out of the corral. A gate gives access to the chicken coop and its fresh eggs.

And our yards all need a gate, just like our houses need doors.

Whenever you open or close a door – a bedroom door or car door or closet door or fridge door or oven door or garage door or outside door or screen door or grocery-store door or bank door or church door - think of the *Repentance Door*, the door that takes us from unfaithfulness to Christ to faithfulness to Christ.

It must be said the *Repentance Door* is sometimes a hard door to walk through. Walking through that door calls for humility, not a smidge of pride permitted. Admitting we were disloyal to our Lord Jesus Christ, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree", is hard. And repentance brings unknowns into our predictable lives.

And yet the *Repentance Door* must be walked through if we are to get from here to there, there being a better life.

The percentage of evangelicals (etcetera) who would not benefit from repentance is zero. Only One was entirely faithful. The rest of us are, at best, wannabes.

Some time after passing through a *Repentance Door* we will be confronted with another *Repentance Door*. And eventually another and another. You see, the gentle and doting Holy Spirit is leading us from "glory to glory". To bring us closer to where the Lord Jesus wants us to be necessitates occasional repentance, a turning from life as is to one of deeper commitment and fuller trust.

Repentance is the answer to most problems. Repentance takes us "from glory to glory". A willingness to repent always results in an improved life. And a wealthier eternity.

T H E S I S # 15

The Bible is a disclosure of the character of God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Scripture is an account of the fall of man into sin, his need for a redeemer, the promise of a redeemer, and the coming of the promised redeemer.

We are redeemed because a) our God is a Redeemer, and b) we entered into His redemption. Had we not entered we would be where we were, on the other side of good, submerged in spiritual darkness, outside of His kingdom.

Some believe all will eventually be included in God's kingdom, most entering after many years of imprisonment in hell. And yet it seems clear Judas, Christ's betrayer, is eternally lost. ("It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.")

God redeems, but not all. Satan has no redeemer, nor his rebel angels. But we escaped eternal wrath though they did not. Thanks be to our God!

We have a Redeemer! We have a Redeemer! We have a Redeemer! Praise be to our God, we have a Redeemer!

Many (most?) within evangelicalism are of the opinion the redeemed can never become *un-*

redeemed; once saved always saved. Such a thought is called 'eternal security'. Born-agains will never (can never!) lose their salvation, no matter how they live out their lives, no matter what choices they make. And yet….

Back to Judas. If Judas really was a follower of Christ (a christian), and if he ended up in eternal hell (the NIV translates Jesus calling him "the one doomed to destruction"), is that not an indication *every* christian could fall from grace and join Judas in that horrible place?

But was Judas *really* a christian?

We know Judas was chosen by the Lord Jesus to be an apostle; does the Lord choose non-christians to be apostles? Also, we know Judas betrayed our Lord (only a friend can betray, and Jesus did call him, "Friend"); one might ask how a non-christian, a non-friend, could betray Christ. Also, Jesus said to His Father, "Those *whom You gave Me* I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition". Isn't this proof Judas was once in the kingdom of God?

Certainly many could counter this logic with another to support 'eternal security'. But perhaps it's sufficient to say the one flirting with sin, the one drifting from the protection of our very *Good Shepherd*, is dumber than that guy who sold his birthright to his brother for some stew.

What is more precious to us than our redemption? Perhaps the majority of evangelicals are right when they say we can never lose our salvation. And perhaps not. Why risk it?

If we were whole we would live out our lives in awe and appreciation of our priceless redemption, never forgetting. When we arrive in heaven we will at last be entire and entirely grateful. The greatness of our redemption demonstrates the greatness of our Redeemer. Both are beyond our ability to comprehend.

The Old Testament and the New are disclosures of the character of our God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We have three "pearl of great price". All Three are alike. There are three like our Christ, and all are ours. We are extremely wealthy.

Lord Jesus added much revelation of the heart and character of our God when He became the man we are.

Many mistakenly think the stern God of the Old Testament is different than the loving God of the New. God changed somewhere between Malachi and Matthew. And yet "Jesus of Galilee" was plenty stern. And the 'Old' God was plenty loving.

God is love and God is holy and God is justice. What does a blending of love and holiness and justice look like? It looks like Jesus.

What does the blending of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22) look like? It looks like Jesus. And it looks like the Father. And it looks like the Holy Spirit.

T H E S I S # 16

Jesus was sent by His Father for the purpose of redeeming man from his sins. Only a perfect and innocent sacrifice could satisfy God's just demand.

How old were You, Lord Jesus, when You began to realize that….

That Your dad was not Your dad? That Your brothers were actually half-brothers, and Your sisters half-sisters? That You were *different*, different than Your siblings, Your parents, the neighbors, religious leaders, and…. and…. *everyone!?* That Your real Father was the Jehovah-God Your parents reverenced?

And Lord Jesus, as a child, what was it like to be….

To be sinless? To be pure? To be at peace? To be without fault? To be fearless? To possess deep insights? To be in harmony with Your God?

And Lord Jesus Christ, were You a teenager when You learned that….

That You were born of a virgin? That Herod murdered innocent babies in an effort to extinguish Your life? That You were the promised Messiah for whom Your people had been waiting for millennia? That You would soon be the Passover Lamb? That You would be the fulfillment of many prophecies?

And Lord Jesus, were You a young man when You first realized that….

That You would never marry? That You would be hated by jealous controllers? That You were to be the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? That You must be the seed that falls into the ground and produces a bountiful harvest? That a cruel cross awaited You? That You would be betrayed "with a kiss"? That You would bear our sins in Your "own body on the tree"? That You would be the perfect and innocent sacrifice that would satisfy God's just demand?

Jesus, what was it like to be Jesus?

T H E S I S # 17

Christ's virgin birth was a dramatic beginning to approximately 33 years on earth. John (the baptist): Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (Jn.3:29)

Never before had a virgin given birth. The God of the impossible did the impossible. Immanuel, "God with us", entered humanity via a young virgin's body and obedience.

Philippians 2:5-7: *Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.*

God actually became a man, the second undefiled male to live on planet earth (Adam being the first). "God with us" ate what we eat, drank what we drink, was warmed by our sun, gazed at our moon, kicked up our dust, breathed our air. He became a citizen of a polluted and distressed humanity so that, as a sinless human, He qualified to be man's redemption. Forever the redeemed will honor and acclaim "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Our precious Lord Jesus was often, perhaps always, embedded in drama. And so were those who touched His life….

"A certain woman" recognized Mary's privilege of being His chosen vessel: "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed you." But like all chosen vessels she paid a price: "Yes, a sword will pass through your own soul also."

And there was "Joseph, her husband, being a just man". "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream warning him of imminent danger, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt.'"

The Baptist, too, was a chosen vessel. "The daughter of Herodias" requested of Herod, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Peter was commissioned by our Jesus, "Feed my lambs…. tend My sheep….feed My sheep." Peter was executed.

"That disciple whom Jesus loved" was privileged to see Christ's transfiguration. John was exiled.

All others of the eleven, it is thought, were martyred.

Paul was "a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel", and with that privilege came adversities: "In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep…."

Lazarus was a close friend. "The chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death."

A blind man no longer blind was "cast out" of the synagogue because he refused to disavow his healer.

Those who companioned with Lord Jesus were persecuted. All who hinted He could be the Messiah were to be cast out.

It's no different today.

"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

One might ask a discomforting question: Why are today's North American evangelicals (etcetera)

suffering such sparse persecution?

Hmmm.

T H E S I S # 18

Jesus: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (Jn.3:16,17)

We are not what we were.

We were citizens of "the world", on the "broad…. way that leads to destruction." Our god was not God, but rather "the god of this age", a despot who hated us then and perhaps more now, now that we escaped his kingdom of darkness and insanity, now that we war against him. (Not that he knows your name or address - there are too many of us - but his awful hatred blankets his creepy kingdom through his creepy underlings.)

Though we were "condemned already", at "enmity with God", we were loved. ("God so loved the world.") We didn't know the love story. And when informed, we found it difficult to believe and accept. Even now we sometimes (often?, usually?) refuse to explore the depth of that love, and allow ourselves to be submerged in that love.

The gift of Christ is the Father's gift to all who receive Christ and all who don't. Had we died before we (finally!) received Christ and deposited ourselves into His care, we would now be a permanent resident of that place the Bible translates as "hell". There is no redeemer on the other side of death.

We escaped death and entered life. For all eternity we will give praises unto the Father who "gave His only begotten Son", and unto the "only begotten Son" who dutifully fulfilled His commission.

1 Corinthians 15:54, 55 (NLT): *Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"*

1 Corinthians 15:57 (NLT): *But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

T H E S I S # 19

Jesus was thoroughly tempted by the devil. Unlike every other person, Jesus did not falter, He did not sin. Jesus went to the cross an unblemished sacrifice.

Mark 1:12: *The Spirit DROVE Him into the wilderness.*

Mark 1:12 NLT: *The Spirit then COMPELLED Jesus to go into the wilderness.*

Mark 1:12 NAS: *The Spirit IMPELLED Him to go into the wilderness.*

The Holy Spirit drove…. compelled…. impelled our Lord Jesus to go into the wilderness, immediately after His baptism in the Jordan, immediately after hearing His Father say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Why? What was the urgency?

Mark 1:13: *He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.*

The Holy Spirit drove our Lord into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted by satan. This temptation went on for forty days. Why?

God is just. More, God is justice. Justice (God) demanded a payment for man's redemption. Calvary had to be. And justice (God) demanded a *flawless* sacrifice, "a lamb without blemish and without spot".

But was Jesus Christ truly flawless? Or would He, like Adam and like all, cave under temptation?

Some say Christ *could not* fail because He was "the Son of God". Yet "the Son of God" was also "the Son of Man". If it were impossible for "the Son of Man" to capitulate to temptation, the temptation would not be a temptation; the test would not be a test.

Matthew 4:2: *When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry.*

Forty days is a long time without food, and some christians have accomplished the feat. If today were the first of June, you would not be eating until the eleventh of July.

After forty days, our Lord Jesus was hungry. You might think he was hungry all forty days, but it doesn't work that way. Hunger begins to subside after about four days of fasting, and fully subsides soon after. Hunger returns after forty days, and the body sternly demands nutrition. And the devil knew that.

After forty days "the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.'" Remember, Jesus was in the wilderness…. no bread, no nothing…. and He was plenty hot, and plenty weak, and plenty hungry. What would be wrong with taking the serpent's suggestion and simply turn a stone into a loaf of bread?

But that was not God's way. It would be less than right to satisfy his hunger by turning a stone into bread.

Had Jesus capitulated to any of the devil's many temptations, at this time in the wilderness or any other time, history would have been totally altered.

The sacrificial Lamb would be spotted, impure, no longer able to save. Calvary would be pointless. We would all be where we once were, serving "the god of this age". Never would we be cloaked in

Christ's righteousness; we would "be filthy still".

And what about Jesus? Would He simply return to His Father, a vanquished Son?

Hardly.

Christ's return would be impossible. Our fate would be His fate, His need for a savior equal to ours.

One might reasonably assume if the omniscient Father knew His Son would falter, He would never have sent Him. But perhaps justice (God) doesn't work that way. God "gave His only begotten Son" because it was the right thing to do. God always does right, even when right turns out wrong. God created Lucifer knowing Lucifer would become satan. And He gifted Adam with Eve knowing she would tempt Adam to stumble.

When we are in heaven these things will be unfolded, and we will know what we now can only speculate. Sufficient to say, if our precious Lord and Savior and Redeemer actually risked His eternity for our sakes our gratitude should increase emphatically.

But unlike Adam and unlike all, our Lord did not cave, though greatly stressed. Three times, when at His weakest, He repelled the devil with Scripture (which should deepen our confidence in Scripture), and undoubtedly many times afterwards. ("But was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.")

Jesus went to the cross an unblemished sacrifice.

T H E S I S # 20

The greatest suffering of Christ was taking the sins of all people upon Himself while on the cross. No one understands how this occurred.

2 Peter 2:24: *Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.*

"In His own body." He carried our sins in His body! Consider: Your sins were actually, for a time, inside the body of Jesus Christ.

He bore all sins. Everybody's. "In His body." While "on the tree."

Judas betrayed the Master "with a kiss"; the next day Lord Jesus bore that sin while on Calvary's cross. Jesus carried the lies of the pharisees' false witnesses, and those that spit in His face and pulled His beard, and those who beat Him with rods and with the whip. He bore Pilate's sins. And those of Barabbas. And every sin of every person who cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" And the sins of the thief who repented…. and the thief who didn't.

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

Adam's treason put a curse on mankind; Lord Jesus bore that trespass on the cross. And at the same time He bore Cain's murder of his brother.

Our precious Christ bore the sins of all people during and previous to Noah's earthly sojourn, sins so perverse "the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth". And our precious Christ carried within Him every perverse sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. And the sins of the prideful pharaohs who abused His chosen people. And, also, the multiple and varied sins of His own people, including the worship of the golden calf.

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

He bore the sins of "the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites" and all the –ites that have risen and fallen throughout our planet throughout the ages. And all the –ites of our time: the Canada-ites, the America-ites, the China-ites, the Australia-ites.

The France-ites, the Brazil-ites, the Greenland-ites, the Germany-ites, the Ukraine-ites, the Spain-ites, the Nigeria-ites, the Egypt-ites, and the many etcetera-ites.

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

The rapist's sins. The fornicator's sins. The murderer's sins. The prostitute's sins. The liar's sins. The hypocrite's sins. The kidnapper's sins. The thief's sins. The abuser's sins. The controller's sins. The pimp's sins.

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

The evangelical's sins. The pharisee's sins. The muslim's sins. The catholic's sins. The pagan's sins. The atheist's sins. The buddhist's sins. The satanist's sins. The jew's sins.

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

All past sins. All present sins. All future sins. Every sin and all sins.

If a sin were a thin dime, the sins of humanity would fill a sizeable warehouse. If every sin became a raindrop, the creek would flood over.

Every trespass against God was carried by His Son while on the cross.

How is it possible? No one knows.

Notice Lord Jesus bore our sins *in*, not *on*, His body. Inside Christ's body, as in ours, were His soul and His spirit; did intangible sin somehow get into either His intangible soul or spirit? No one knows.

Luke 23:44: *And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.*

How dark was dark? Like when there's an eclipse of the sun and you can still see well enough to get around? Or rather like the "thick darkness which may even be felt" that cursed Pharaoh's Egypt for three days? Was our Christ actually out of man's sight for a time? We only know "there was darkness" for three hours, from noon till three. Why? For what purpose?

Did our Father decree darkness so none would see His Son bearing all humanity's dark and putrid sins?

Did Lord Jesus deal with our sins one person at a time? If so, each one of us must have been on His mind and in His heart, for a time, while hanging on that cross. Yes, such is impossible considering the huge numbers who lived and live and will live on our planet. But is He not the God of the impossible?

Or did the Lord Jesus deal with all of our sins together, at one time - an immense, repulsive brew of mischief and decadence and feebleness?

We simply don't know.

2 Corinthians 5:21: *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.*

Lord Jesus *became* sin!? Or was He, as some translations suggest, simply an *offering* for sin?

We simply do not know.

But one day we will.

How utterly and completely horrifying it must have been for our Lord Jesus Christ to have been contaminated by our corruption and weakness and betrayals and perversions! The "Holiest of all", He "who knew no sin", carried "in His own body" all that is despicable and mean and corrupt.

Thank You, Sir.

T H E S I S # 21

The salvation Christ provided for every man, woman, and child is beyond ability to describe or comprehend. Believers in Christ are actually "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." (Rm.8:17) God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." (Eph.1:3)

Adam, before his fateful flub, had it pretty good. But not as good as us. Not only did God recover for us all that was lost, He added more. Our future is better than the best of Adam's past.

Though Adam lived in serenity, our serenity will surpass his. Heaven is much more awesome than the earth Adam ruled. What will it be like to live in a sinless land where the lion lies down with the lamb? We will soon find out.

There are many people, though *relatively* few, who have gone to heaven and returned to tell us about it. They all say the same thing, even those who make their living with words: Heaven is indescribable.

'Indescribable' is the only adjective that rightly describes heaven.

Adam's "garden of Eden" must have been awesome…. magnificent…. astounding. But not

indescribable. Those giving a report about 'the other side' all profess an inability to portray the awe and wonder of our future home. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." Before us, just around the bend, is a life so wondrous as to be beyond human ability to comprehend.

It would be so good if we could have just a peek of heaven…. a quick visit to what will soon be our permanent residence where "the Lamb is its light"…. just a few minutes surveying the holy angels and purified saints and grand vistas….. momentarily submerged in the actual presence of our Most High God. Surely our passion for Lord Jesus would be turned up a notch or two (or five or ten).

Many do not believe one's salvation can be lost, even the one living carelessly and selfishly. There's an argument for and against such a thesis. But surely it is insanity for the one who experienced, in fullness, the actual presence of our Lord and King and Savior and Creator to drift from the protection of *The Good Shepherd.* Sanity would never chance the loss of such a great salvation.

And as good as our future is it can be made better. Much better. Because we will be rewarded for faithfulness. As angels have various degrees of glory, so do heaven's saints. Your rank (station, position) will not be determined by Christ, but by you. Consider: your obedience on earth (and lack thereof) establishes your eternal rank in heaven.

And consider: The quality of relationship you have developed with the Lord Jesus Christ will be eternally established.

Obviously, if we will be rewarded for faithfulness we will likewise "suffer loss" for wavering. Lord Jesus instructed us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth." Yet most whose names are registered in "the Lamb's Book of Life" diligently "lay up for selves treasures on earth." Temporary "treasures on earth" cost eternal "treasures in heaven". A wise christian lives for tomorrow.

Earth time seems like a long time, but it isn't. Paul speaks of life on earth as "a moment". If time here is a moment, time there is a millennium. Our single moment actually determines the quality of life for the millennium. Yet most live, not for the millennium, but for the moment. Now that's real dumb.

Sometimes *The Word* says things beyond comprehension. How could we possibly be "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"? What is God's is ours. Angels are not heirs, not the mightiest. But we are. We are "joint heirs with Christ" and with each other. Who can fathom such generosity?

What more could God give? Who could improve His salvation?

We are actually "the righteousness of God" in Christ Jesus. Selah. (Think about that.)

We are *justified*, as if we never sinned. Selah.

We will be *glorified*, just as our Lord was glorified. Selah.

We have been made *holy*. Selah.

Our "body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." Selah.

Christ abides in us, as does the Father. Selah.

God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Selah.

Thank You, Father. Thank You, Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You, Holy Spirit.

T H E S I S # 22

The death and resurrection of Jesus were fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and His own prophecies.

God foretells. He gives a word and then fulfills that word. As a shepherd watches over his flock, so does our God watch over His promises to fulfill them.

Sometimes it takes months to fulfill a prophecy, sometimes centuries and sometimes several millennia. Many Old Testament prophecies are yet to be accomplished.

Immediately after Adam fell, the Lord gave a promise of a Redeemer to free Adam, and us all, from the consequences of sin. Adam and Eve eventually became a multitude, but still no Redeemer. Centuries evolved into millennia, and still no Redeemer. Did God forget His promise?

Two thousand years or so after God's pledge to Adam, God found a man through whom He could bring His promised savior. His name is Abraham. As you know, Abraham was willing to slay his and Sarah's only son, Isaac, at the command of the Lord. An interesting conjecture is that this extreme act of obedience was the requirement for the Messiah to gain entrance into human history, as indicated by God's promise to Abraham: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, BECAUSE you have obeyed My voice."

Abraham found "a ram caught in a thicket by its horns", and this, instead of Isaac, became the sacrifice unto God. A sheep is a 'type' (or model) of Christ. Many sheep have been slaughtered and offered as sacrifices over the centuries, each sacrifice 'prophesying' the coming promised Redeemer. That's why John declared of the Antitype (that which had been symbolized), Jesus Christ, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." No, God had not forgotten His promise.

You know the passover story. Every year since the "pass over" of the protected children of God, the people were instructed to eat a lamb as a memorial of that day. The lamb must be a male "without blemish" because the lamb depicted Christ. Each passover celebration was prophetic, pointing to the coming Messiah.

More millennia passed and thousands of passover feasts were celebrated before (finally!) the promised Redeemer entered humanity. Gabriel announced His birth to a virgin: "You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus." Approximately thirty-three years

later, the day before His crucifixion, Jesus was sharing the passover feast with His twelve apostles.

Of all the thousands of passover celebrations, the meal shared by these thirteen men was, by far, more significant and memorable. Historic, actually. For this meal was more than the emblematic lamb "without blemish". Present was the actual, long awaited "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world", the fulfillment of that which millions of slaughtered and consumed lambs 'foretold'. The Antitype, with His twelve, devoured the type. Earlier in the day the type (a lamb) was sacrificed; tomorrow the Antitype would be sacrificed. But the twelve were oblivious to the grand significance of the moment.

They didn't get it.

Two days previous our Lord said to the twelve, "After two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." What is not to understand? And yet….

They didn't get it.

The twelve didn't get it, the multitude celebrating Christ's entrance into Jerusalem two days previous didn't get it, the murderous pharisees who paid thirty pieces of silver for His betrayal didn't get it, the frenzied mob screaming "Crucify Him!" didn't get it. None got it. None discerned the obvious. All had ears, but none had "ears to hear" apparent spiritual truth.

The apostles should not have been fearful and dispirited after our Lord's death because Lord Jesus told them at least three times He would be raised from death "the third day".

But they didn't get it.

Their problem is our problem, is every christian's problem. What plagued them plagues all - a *spiritual denseness* hindering us to ascertain spiritual truths. The evidence of this spiritual disease is found everywhere in Christ's church. One example of many….

Few live in the reality we must give an account to the Lord Jesus Christ. We speak more of accountability to each other than to Him. The enormity of that future day escapes almost all, and because of spiritual denseness we do not detect Scripture's warnings, such as….

Romans 14:10: *We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

Romans 14:12: *Each of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Hebrews 4:13: *All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

But we don't get it. Accountability to Christ our Judge is not an issue, is not reality, is not in our conversation, is rarely preached.

Many such spiritual realities just don't penetrate the bulk of the church. We are diseased with a sin-bought incapacity that chokes our learning. We have ears, but not "ears to hear" clearly. There are

foul spiritual blockages that must be dealt with.

So what's the answer?

The first step is to acknowledge we really are infected with a spiritual denseness, that we have been slow to learn, that we don't fathom the easily fathomable, that we don't perceive the apparent…. that we are not as smart as we think. This calls for real humility. Humility is rewarded with grace, needed grace to overcome spiritual doltishness…. so we can grasp spiritual truths as readily as mathematical or domestic or societal truths.

A primal reason those who don't get it don't get it because they don't want to get it. Desired truth readily gains entrance; truth that upsets *the way it is* in our lives doesn't easily penetrate. We must repent of being the lord of our lives, of wanting to be heroic, of self-centeredness.

We have a God-given capacity to strengthen, deliberately and continuously, our bond to our precious Redeemer, "our Passover", *The Teacher*. He will make learning a joy.

And He will tell us things to come.

T H E S I S # 23

Jesus foretold most people would reject Him and His salvation.

What can we give to our Lord Jesus that He doesn't already have?

We can give Him our neighbors. And/or relatives. And/or friends and acquaintances.

Lord Jesus does *not* have everything because He does *not* have everyone. He only has a relative few. A minority. A remnant.

Few: *"Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are FEW who find it."*

Many: *"Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are MANY who go in by it."*

How few are few? How many are many?

When our Lord Jesus spoke of few and many, He was referencing adults, not infants in the womb or children not yet accountable. So, most thankfully, few are less few and many are less many.

Nonetheless the numbers of both FEW and MANY are staggering.

Worldometers.info and others suggest humanity's total number of births to be about 100 billion. The number of conceptions that didn't result in births would greatly increase that number. But for discussion sake let's say the total number of people ever residing on planet earth is 100 billion. That's 100 billion people living *somewhere* at this moment.

100 billion is a lot of people, equal to 100 thousand cities each with a population of 1 million. If you started counting non-stop, even at a young age, you would never reach 100 billion.

And increase comes at an amazing rate. By the time you said, for example, 4 billion 492 million, 787 thousand 9 hundred and 61, approximately 30 babies would have joined humanity.

If a few ("there are FEW who find it") is 5 percent, that translates into 5 billion people. But perhaps it would be safe to double, or even quadruple that number because of the many children who died before losing their innocence. The percentage of FEW *could be* 20 percent. 20 percent of 100 billion is 20 billion people, most of who are in heaven.

If many ("there are MANY who go in by it") is 80 percent that equals *80 billion* people, most of whom are in hell, the remainder on their way.

Perhaps, and hopefully, FEW are more than 20 percent and MANY are less than 80. Only our God knows.

The final population of heaven and hell will be determined, largely, by Christ's church on earth. FEW can be much increased and MANY sharply decreased. Unfortunately, the light of the church, the only "light of the world", is as dim as that flashlight that badly needs new batteries. There is light, but not much.

And it will always be so. Nonetheless….

Nonetheless your neighbors are *your* neighbors. Your parents and siblings and children are *your* parents and siblings and children. Your relatives are *your* relatives. They are within *your* influence. The church's dimness matters not to them; what matters is the brightness of *your* light.

Assimilation. Let's talk assimilation.

The twelve (yes, including Judas) assimilated Christ. Not fully, of course, not even close. But because they were in His presence each absorbed, somewhat, who He is.

And they assimilated each other. Can you see, for example, Andrew's commitment to Christ would be different, shallower or deeper, if he kept different company? Matthew's character was carved, mostly, by Christ's influence, and, to a lesser degree, by his spiritual brothers. Thomas' unbelief was a drag on the twelve while his loyalty to Lord Jesus ("Let us also go, that we may die with Him.") was positive.

And people assimilate you (again, not fully, of course).

To varying degrees each under your influence absorbs who you are. You affect. Life would be different if life were minus you.

The quality of any gathering is determined by all. You may not be as impacting as the blabber, but your presence does matter. That's why it's so important how bright your light shines. "You are the

salt of the earth." You make others thirsty for Christ. And you can become progressively saltier.

Who we are - our value as a person and as a witness - is the result of who we have been attached to…. who we are bonded with…. who we abide in. Every one of us can, if we so choose and if willing to pay the price, assimilate more of Christ.

Quality fruit is the fruit of quality relationship, and good fruit always includes salvations. The abider is a natural evangelist. Abiding in Christ brightens our light, which makes surrounding darkness less dark. The Christ-life becomes enviable, wanted.

Also, the passionate have better results in intercessory prayer than the tepid. He/she who is tightly knit to Jesus Christ prays with power. Neighborhoods can be transformed by one neighbor's faith in God's precious Son.

Isaiah 53:6: *The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

The iniquity of what could eventually total 100 billion people or more? Our precious Christ bore "in His own body on the tree" the sins of 100 billion people? He did this knowing in advance most would refuse this costly and priceless redemption?

Really?

T H E S I S # 24

Because of His obedience Jesus Christ now sits in indescribable majesty and glory at the right hand of the Father.

(See note.) THEREFORE is a connector word that connects before to after, effort to results, seeds planted to harvest reaped.

The Lord Jesus had His THEREFORE between life on earth and life after His return to heaven….

Philippians 2:5-8: *Jesus Christ… being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And…He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

Life on earth was Christ's season of seeding. Following this holy sojourn on earth was Christ's THEREFORE….

Philippians 2:9: *THEREFORE…*

And after THEREFORE comes the Lord's harvest….

Philippians 2:9-11: *THEREFORE God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth,*

and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Father was not being generous to His Son; He was being just. Lord Jesus got what He deserved, nothing more. He was so heavily rewarded because He bowed so low, obeyed so fully.

Our THEREFORE, be it wondrous or terrible or somewhere between, is en route, linking our life on earth to our eternity in the New Jerusalem.

Our now will soon be our before, followed by our THEREFORE, followed by our eternal after. Today we seed, tomorrow we reap.

2 Corinthians 5:10: *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

This judgment reveals our THEREFORE, the value of our eternity. Eternal rewards attained and eternal rewards lost will be exact because our Judge is just, perfectly so. As Lord Jesus, we will get what we deserve, nothing more, nothing less.

The wise christian, then, bows low before the Master and obeys fully.

Note: This is taken from a series of articles, *333* WORDS…. *Exactly*. (www. 333words.org).

T H E S I S # 25

Those embracing Jesus and His salvation have opportunity to further develop their relationship with Him.

Think of a 3-way incandescent light bulb, you know, low-medium-high. Good, you got it! Now think of a 100-way (!) light bulb, a bulb that goes from a meager 10 watts way up to 1000.

Christians glow. “You are the light of the world.” Few are a dim 10 watts, most much higher.

“Those embracing Jesus and His salvation have opportunity” to brighten their light. Regardless how dim or how bright your light is today, it can be brighter tomorrow.

You might think a typical new convert would start at or near the 10-watt setting and work his way up. But no, it doesn’t work that way.

The new convert often, perhaps usually, starts at the peak brightness of his christianity, and from there dims down. (Someone suggested a christian is one of very few earth-creatures that dies smaller than when born.)

At first the recently converted is passionate for Christ, having experienced the wonder of rebirth. His setting could be as high as 300. This “light of the world” shines bright, and tells whoever will listen (and whoever won’t) about his newfound Savior. He’s quite an evangelist.

What's supposed to happen is increase. He has much and now has opportunity to acquire more. The light within is supposed to brighten, a steady climb from 300 to 310 to 320 and upward.

But that's not usually how it works.

We have a tendency to go back to where we come from. There's a pull to return to bygone days and bygone ways. Call it homesickness. Life before Christ was life without Christ, and so a full return is, again, a life without Christ. Thankfully, most never retreat that far. But usually there is a withdrawal from that high place in Jesus. After Christ's crucifixion distraught "Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.'"

It's usually a gradual, imperceptible backsliding. 300 watts dims to 290, then 280, then….

Because the 300-watts convert is surrounded by dull lights, his dimming light still seems sufficiently bright.

Typically, the 300 attaches himself to an evangelical church, a congregation averaging 150 watts or so. It's a strange relationship….

The 300-watts convert looks to the 150s as examples and for direction. Surely, he thinketh, these people must be at least 500 watts. After all, they've got lots of seniority.

And the 150 people assume the new convert must be less than 50. After all, he's the greenhorn. And they consider themselves to be at least 500 watts. After all, they've read the Bible cover to cover at least five times. And they have sat under the ministry of Pastor One-Sixty for several years. And they've attended at least five conferences. And umpteen Bible studies and prayer breakfasts.

They certainly know how to look after this youngster-in-Christ. Soon he will be a church member, pay his tithes, give them his loyalty and…. becomes as mature and bright as they are!

The Galatians were doing fine (300 watts?) until the judaizers (50 watts?) dropped by to help out. From there it was downhill, 300 watts to 250 to 200 to 150 to….

"You are the light of the world" to the degree Christ shines through you. He wants to shine through you *increasingly*, both for your sake and His. You will never reach 1000 watts; what you strive for is more. Continuous more is healthy christianity.

More can eventually result in a bright 500-watts disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the hungry will not be satisfied with 500; they will insist on more of Lord Jesus, always more.

T H E S I S # 26

Relationally, christians have as much of Jesus as they want. A deeper, richer relationship is always available to the one determined to acquire it. Pursuing Christ should be a way of life.

Yes, "Relationally, christians have as much of Jesus as they want"…. sufficiently.

You want more of Lord Jesus than you have, but to have more you must want more *sufficiently*. Christ costs.

Wanting Christ sufficiently is wanting more of Him more than you don't want more of Him.

Most of us wanted Christ before we were saved, but insufficiently. So we lived out our impoverishment until willing to pay the price of Christ.

Now that we have Christ we want more of Christ. Tasting made us hungry. Because we know Him we want to enter deeper into who He is. But…. Christ costs.

And that's the dilemma. We want more of Christ *and* we don't want more of Christ. We have today the quality of relationship determined by yesterday's choices. Because of wise choices we have a superior kinship than some. And because of foolish choices our attachment to our Jesus is inferior to others.

We do have what we did want…. sufficiently.

It's comforting to know a richer association with Jesus our Lord is always available. His arms are outstretched. His welcome is warm and enthusiastic. He loves us so.

Jeremiah 29:13: *You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

That's with *all* your heart. His affection for you is strong, and He is injured and grieved by a tepid response.

Christianity should not be an effort to be good, but to be close. Close doesn't necessarily accompany good, but good always accompanies close. Before we embraced our precious Redeemer we tried to be good, but good never satisfied. And being good doesn't satisfy today, except perhaps the lukewarm.

Seeking Christ is a holy agenda and should be the primary ambition of every evangelical and every non-evangelical.

T H E S I S # 27

Jesus taught a vibrant relationship with Him is a requirement for fruitfulness. Jesus: Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. (Jn.15:4)

John 15:4 should be memorized.

Lord Jesus: *I am the vine, you are the branches.*

He who takes *The Teacher's* words seriously will from this day forward consider himself to be a branch, a branch attached to our precious Christ, *The Vine.*

You are a branch, I am a branch, every christian is a branch. We became a branch that instant we were "born of the Spirit". We were born a branch, we will die a branch, we will be a branch for eternity. The only way to cease being a branch is to stop abiding in *The Vine*….

Lord Jesus: *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.*

What did our Lord mean, "He takes away"?

May we never find out.

Every evangelical (etcetera) abides in Christ. Relative few evangelicals (etcetera) abide in Christ *substantially*. Jesus taught, "Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45) The NLT translates Christ's words this way: "What you say flows from what is in your heart." And the NAS: "His mouth speaks from that which fills his heart."

So the heart filled with Jesus speaks Jesus. And the heart that isn't doesn't. To know the heart of evangelicalism simply monitor evangelicals. Rare is the evangelical, new converts excepted, who speaks the name of Jesus frequently.

So once more….

Every evangelical abides in Christ; few abide in Christ substantially.

And that is christianity's major dilemma. And that is also the dilemma of "the world", because their eternal future is largely determined by Christ's church.

It is so obvious a branch must have a healthy connection to its vine to have healthy fruit. Why is it less obvious to the christian that she too must be well bonded to her vine, *The Vine*, to have abundant fruit?

You have just read, "Few abide in Christ substantially." Does this statement shock you, challenge you, upset you, anger you? Or did it, like one of many birds decorating your world, fly overhead unnoticed? Saint, are you *able* to (are you *free* to) consider…. to determine…. to see and hear?

Those abiding in Christ observe freely. Church business is relevant to the one subject to His lordship, to he who is cognizant of Him being here, to she who sits at the Master's feet. One does not love Christ devoutly while being indifferent to the plight of christianity. The mature observe and inspect, and are duly concerned.

It is right to be troubled; it is wrong to not care. Martin Luther dared to observe, and then dared to care, and then dared to challenge.

There is a weight on the abiding born-again. He is concerned. She hurts. But caring is insufficient; two truths must be equally relevant to be effectual for Christ:

Truth # one: *Without Me you can do nothing.*

We think we can, but we can't. Jesus said so.

Truth # two: *He who abides in Me , and I in him, bears much fruit.*

We must know: Without Him we can't; with Him we can. All that we accomplish can be credited to our connection to Jesus, God's holy Christ.

"The heart is deceitful above all things." The one relationally distant to our Lord Jesus presumes to be close, and would be ticked at anyone hinting otherwise. Because the evangelical has commonality with his contemporaries – walking their walk and talking their talk – and because he is too 'humble' to critique the group's spirituality, he is confident all is well.

Being accepted is crucial to the child, the teen and the post-teen. Few outgrow the urgency to fit in. Acceptance is the measurement of worth and success. That's why the pagan rejects Christ's *Great Invitation* to be one with Him; if all believed, he would too.

And that's why the evangelical ignores Christ's *Great Invitation* to go deeper in Him; if all were passionate she would be too. Being a radical for Christ isn't fashionable in a christian society worshipping a distant Jesus. Therefore less of them is the price of more of Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ beckons you higher. To come up you must come away. And if you do embrace that *Great Invitation* and do attain a better life, the *Great Invitation* is still in effect, beckoning you still higher.

Higher and higher - that's healthy christianity. Higher and higher translates into more and more of every good thing. Higher and higher adds pleasure to pleasure unto your King and your God. He loves you so.

T H E S I S # 28

The ultimate example of a healthy, abiding relationship is Jesus and His Father. Jesus often spoke of His Father because the Father was the emphasis of His heart.

"The Son of God" was also "the Son of Man". The title the Lord Jesus conferred upon Himself – "the Son of Man" – demonstrates His want to intimately identify with us, also sons of man.

Jesus called the pharisees "son of hell" because hell was awaiting them, and this was their most relevant reality. Paul, "filled with the Holy Spirit", called a sorcerer "the son of the devil" because of who he served and his propensity to do evil. Lord Jesus called the brothers James and John "Sons of Thunder" because, apparently, it described their temperament.

The "Son of God" title clearly conveys His divinity, and the "Son of Man" title establishes His humanity; to us, what could be more complimentary and solacing?

Lord Jesus did not cease being God when He became a man. He was "Immanuel, which is

translated, 'God with us.'" "*Though he was God*, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to." (NLT) "Though he was God" He did cease *functioning* as God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ *functioned* as a man, and that's relevant. Christ as a man did good; we as a man/woman can likewise do good.

How, as a man, did our Lord accomplish so much?

Lord Jesus did the works He did because of His abiding relationship with His Father. God on earth was continually directed and replenished by God in heaven. We are the fruit of Their relationship. Had Their relationship been less than healthy, we would be in *very* serious trouble.

We can only be as productive as our relationship to Christ is solid. The Master said, "He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also." Why, then, only few do the works He did? Because….

Because we simply do not trust in the One who sent us ("As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.") to the same degree as the One who sent us trusted the One who sent Him. Only the one trusting Jesus as Jesus trusted the Father will do works similar to the works of Jesus.

Quality of relationship should matter more than it does.

None of us are capable of abiding in our Lord in the same healthy manner our Lord did abide in the Father. He trusted His Sender more than we trust our Sender. That is why we will never accomplish what He accomplished.

But we can do more than what we are now doing. We can do more than most. Improvement is always possible. We can complete our assignment ("I have finished the race."), glorify the Father ("By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit."), lay up abundant treasures in heaven. Many more will be eternally saved if we strengthen the attachment of the branch to *The Vine*.

By His speech we know Lord Jesus was continually cognizant of the fact He was indeed a sent One….

As the Father sent Me… He who receives Me receives Him who sent Me… He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted… For this purpose I have been sent… He who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me… My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me… He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him… He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life… And on and on.

The Christ, too, is a sender….

As the Father has sent Me, I also send you… Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers… I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves… The Son of Man will send out His angels… I send you prophets, and wise men, and scribes… And began to send them out two by two… The Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two… He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

And *The Christ*, "the Lord of the harvest" and "the head of the church", will send every compliant

disciple.

When is the last time you heard a brother or sister in Christ refer to him/herself, or another, as a sent one?

Unlike the twelve, and unlike the seventy, and unlike Paul and Barnabas, and unlike the prophets of old, most evangelicals (etcetera) are not living the reality they too are (or have the potential of being) sent ones.

T H E S I S # 29

Jesus: Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Mt.12:34) The spiritual health of a christian can be determined by the number of times he speaks the name of Jesus. The spiritual health of a church can likewise be determined by the number of times they collectively speak the name of Jesus.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

What's in comes out.

We all have a reservoir, and we all have a tap. To see what's in the reservoir we merely have to turn on the tap. The reservoir is the heart. The tap is the tongue.

Every heart contains a mixture of the good, the bad, and the ugly. The mixture of your heart is different from all others. That composite makes you you.

You are not your pretty face, and you are not your knobby knees, and you are not the shape of your body. You are your heart. You are what's inside.

It's easy to know what's in the heart of an engaged couple. They talk about the other more than oneself. She is in his heart, and he is in hers. They're in love.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

During one encounter with "the scribes and Pharisees" the Lord Jesus called them "hypocrites!" seven times. They were pretenders, pretending to be what they were not. Obviously, pretence filled their hearts. Even their prayers, which seemed to resonate with sincerity, were for the purpose of impressing and subduing. ("For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.")

What was in, leaked out.

As the pretender speaks pretence, so does the proud speak pride, the humble speaks humility, the anxious speaks anxiety, the doubtful speaks doubt, the confused speaks confusion, the religious speaks religion, the hopeful speaks hope, the peaceful speaks peace, the angry speaks anger, the joyful speaks joy, the kind speaks kindness, the impatient speaks impatience, the sad speaks sadness. And the Christ-centered….

And the Christ-centered speaks Christ. Can't help it. Because He is the main element in the reservoir, He comes out the tap.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Because Christ flowed out of Paul's life through his writings, perhaps it's safe to assume Christ also flowed through his speech. ("I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.") Same with Matthew and Mark and Luke and John and Peter. They were not shy to proclaim Christ. Couldn't help it.

Each of us can determine the content of our reservoir by simply monitoring what pours out our tap. Our speech reveals what's in there. If Christ is predominant, Christ will be exalted.

Same applies to the group. Their collective speech reveals their collective spiritual health. This truism coupled with another truism – the group affects the outcome of all in the group – make evaluation a smart thing to do. And it's easy to do, just listen.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

T H E S I S # 30

Oddly and perplexingly and sadly, evangelicals seldom speak the name of Jesus. Preachers often neglect Jesus in their sermons.

You are sitting beside a still pond in the morning sun, leaning against a tree, relaxing, sleepy. Birds fly about chattering, frogs rest on lily pads, turtles sunbathe on a floating log, butterflies dot the sky. Pure serenity, real nice.

Five evangelical retirees gathering for their weekly breakfast are a relaxed bunch. Conversations free of controversy while talking a variety of issues makes the gathering…. well…. satisfactory. All five are careful not to upset the tranquil atmosphere draping their table and neighboring tables. Spiritually, everything is as undisturbed as your pond. Oh-oh, here comes Fred.

For no reason, just something to do, you toss a pebble in the water. Ripples ebb from the splash, the pond is disturbed, but only slightly.

Fred isn't invited to join the five because…. well…. everybody knows Fred. So he just stands at the table, chattering, waiting for an invite that isn't extended, and in his chatter mentions *God* because God is his favorite subject. The *God* word was like your little pebble, disturbing the peaceful ambience, but only slightly. Even the invisible yawning demons were not disturbed.

That was fun, thou thinkest. You throw another pebble, and another, and another. *Plunk! Plunk! Plunk!* Now the pond is agitated as ripples bump into themselves and scurry across the water surface.

Fred repeats the *God* word - *Plunk! Plunk! Plunk!* – making serious ripples in their serenity, the

people at nearby tables are getting edgy, the demons are now wide awake. *This ain't good*, said one ugly to the other uglies.

Little pebbles are getting boring, you spot a hefty rock, you know you shouldn't but the temptation is too great, you toss that rock into the innocent pond. *Ker-splash!* The splash sends little waves across the pond, the birds stop chirping, frogs slide into the water, the turtles draw in their heads.

Insensitive Fred mentions *The Name,* a hefty rock that – *Ker-splash!* - shatters the breakfast tranquility. Yes, *The Name* that's "above every name that is named", that name the five rarely speak - not to friends and not to wife and not to kids and not to grandkids. The five look down at their plates, none commenting, hoping Fred will take the hint, turn off his talking machine, just walk away. Which he does.

Fifteen minutes pass, tranquility has returned, you tire of all the peace and calm, you rapid-fire more rocks – *Ker-splash! Ker-splash! Ker-splash!*- and *whoosh!*, the tranquility is like gone. The water surface is chaos, birds fly in panic, frogs disappear, turtles hit the water.

Fifteen minutes pass, tranquility has returned, the five re-enjoy their conversation about nothing relevant, even the demons are relaxed. Oh-oh, looks like Fred – just-doesn't-get-it-Fred – is coming back. This time Fred rapid-fires *The Name – Ker-splash! Ker-splash! Ker-splash!* - speaking (from his heart, no less!) the wonder of his Lord, his deep appreciation for Calvary, and his desire to know Him more intimately. Demons scatter, those at nearby tables gulp the last of their breakfast, the five glance at their watch remembering obligations.

You may think this analogy a bit harsh and unrealistic. But is it…. ?

Do you remember hearing *The Name – The Name* that's "above every name that is named" – mentioned at the cashier line-up at grocery stores (where every christian shops)? Or in your doctor's waiting room? Or at a kid's baseball/football/basketball game? Or in your own home? Or in the christian school's hallway? Or the church foyer? Or in the restaurant where you gather with friends after sunday's service?

You know what a pedometer is – a meter that counts the steps you walk. Wouldn't it be interesting to have a Jesus-ometer that counts the number of times *The Name – The Name* that's "above every name that is named" - is spoken in your hearing? Sadly, at the end of many (most?) days such a meter would register zero. At the end of some preacher's messages (thankfully not all) it would read between zero and a few.

There is no intended condemnation in these words – there really isn't. There is a problem, a very serious problem, in Christ's church that must be confronted to make way for needed reformation. How can problems be fixed if they're ignored?

So why is *The Name – The Name* that's "above every name that is named" – sidestepped by Christ's own? Because….

Because # one: Christ polarizes.

"Do not think I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." In every nation Christ polarizes. In every social status Christ polarizes. Same in all departments of all business enterprises. Same in every political party. At McDonalds, Walmart, the gym, the hospital, the workplace, the neighborhood, and *everywhere* there is enmity between Christ and the Christ-less. That's just *the way it is*, that's the world we live in.

The devil, through human agency, vehemently and tirelessly opposes our Lord Jesus. Naturally *The Name* – *The Name* that's "above every name that is named" – brings tension whenever and wherever spoken. And who wants tension?

And Christ's church is not free of polarization, not at all. The less-than-passionate toward Christ resent (and outnumber) the passionate. There is tension within the family. Passionate, just-doesn't-get-it Fred, and people like Fred, cause ripples by the mere mention of *The Name*. Best to sidestep *The Name*.

Because # two: Christ insists on being lord.

Most are not prepared to surrender the lordship of their life to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is so difficult to stop being one's own decision-maker, to abdicate lordship of self (or who/whatever).

Lord Jesus does not meet the hesitant evangelical (etcetera) halfway. The fallible must bow to the infallible; nothing less is acceptable in a Christ-christian relationship. Though Lord Jesus, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, beckons the evangelical into closeness, He reads and honors what is written in bold letters across his heart, "THANKS JESUS, BUT NO THANKS!"

Such a christian has decided to keep his Lord at a certain distance. Such a christian is resisting the entreating of the Holy Spirit. Naturally, such a christian avoids speaking *The Name*.

Because # three: Idols.

An idol is that which replaces one's *First Love*. In Christ's church there is an assortment of idols, some human and some not, each harmful, each deceptive.

Many idols began as God's blessing. The young lady praying for a christian husband soon placed her answer above Christ. The fellow who got the job he prayed for now uses hours he used to spend pursuing Christ pursuing advancement.

When one loses sight of *First Love*, one loses sight. Consequently, she who has an idol (as most do) assumes she doesn't. Avoiding *The Name* makes it easier for the willfully blind to stay blind.

Because # four: The itch to build.

Not all itch to build, but many do.

Before conversion to our Lord Jesus the contractor had visions of building an enviable construction business, a legacy, something that will ensure his family's adulation, something to gaze upon with satisfaction in future years. At conversion he became a member of a different society and soon realized the most effective way to attain christians' approval and adulation and envy is to build an influential ministry. So the same hankering to accomplish is now applied to a new vision. The itch gets scratched, but his motive has improved only slightly.

Many ministries have been created by this unsanctified need to do, to accomplish, to succeed, to be worthy. Maintaining this vision necessitates avoiding the Christ who convicts against self-centered religious ambitions.

Parenting is a ministry. Often couples prefer raising children outside the Bible's wisdom, trusting instead the world's fickle methodology. This disobedience devalues the relationship between Dad and Christ, Mom and Christ. *The Name* will be spoken less.

Because # five: Pride.

Pride stinks. This obnoxious sin is unreasonable simply because everything we have has been given. "What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast?"

Pride destroys. Pride keeps many from attaining Christ's salvation, and pride will be the cause of many in Christ's church to be relationally impoverished.

"God resists the proud." (James 4:6) "God opposes the proud." (NLT) "God is opposed to the proud." (NAS) "God against proud ones doth set himself.") (YLT) "God sets Himself against the proud and haughty." (TAB)

The proud resist God and God resists the proud. The prideful may intellectualize many religious subjects, using holy things to puff an unholy ego, but he steers away from the subject of Jesus Christ.

There are many more than these five reasons christians avoid the name of our Lord Jesus.

A heart is limited and can only contain so much. For Christ to increase, idols and needless distractions must be dumped out.

Your speech reveals your heart. To know what's in there, listen to yourself. What you talk about most is what infatuates you. If you do not monitor your speech you might go on imagining yourself to be a person you are not.

You are not a shackled victim, but rather a product of choices made and words spoken. The ingredients of your heart, the kind and measure, is what makes you you. You can change the ingredients. Improvement is always possible, and this is good news.

To better your life, better the outpouring of words.

To go deeper in Christ you must control your speech.

While we speak *The Name* sparingly, we all speak *I* and *me* excessively. So the solution is simple: Speak *Christ* more and speak *me* less.

James 3:2: *If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.*

James is saying it's harder to control the tongue than any other faculty, somewhere between very difficult and impossible. But thankfully, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That's "through Christ". I can't, He won't, we (Christ and I) can.

Health of words spoken determines health of life. The fruit we bear will be of no higher quality than our speech. Eternity, ours and others, is affected by what we say. Eternal rewards dispensed up there will be relative to our declarations down here. The importance of controlling our tongue can't be overemphasized.

There is similarity between the person wanting to improve his physical health and the evangelical determined to improve his spiritual health. To better one's physical health the consumer must, obviously, improve his diet. Not only must he stop eating detrimental food, he must consume wholesome food.

To improve his spiritual health the evangelical must prevent himself from speaking adverse words (non-Biblical words, anger words, envy words, discouragement words, unbelief words, etcetera) and, equally important, diligently *compel* himself to speak favorable words (Bible words, true words, faith words, love words, encouragement words, etcetera). The more Bible truths spoken, the more improvement to his spiritual condition.

And nothing is healthier than speaking *The Name.* Speaking Christ will radically transform one's life. There is power in that name. There is victory in that name.

Speaking *Christ* will, at first, require determination and perseverance. And courage. It takes grit to speak *Christ*, yes even in His church, simply because Christ does polarize. Relevance revolves around Him. He is the center. His name pierces.

The unsanctified soul should not be allowed to babble. Like other faculties the tongue can both bless and harm. We supervise what we see, hear, think, eat, drink, and touch; we must likewise supervise what we say.

It's unreasonable for Christ's own to go a day, a week, a month without speaking *The Name – The Name* that's "above every name that is named."

T H E S I S # 31

Some evangelicals speak 'God' often but 'Christ' rarely. Paul's letters 'spoke' God often and Christ more often. New Testament writings 'speak' Christ more times than God, Father, and Holy

Spirit combined.

Balance is often a misused word, sometimes used to validate carnality and surface christianity. The Bible is the mind and heart of God ("All Scripture is given by inspiration of God") and is therefore perfectly balanced.

Evangelicals make the mistake of comparing themselves with evangelicals to determine if they are properly adjusted. To be perfectly adjusted - in reality an impossibility - one must do and think and speak only Bible truths.

The evangelical who disproportionately speaks *God* is out of balance with the Bible and, therefore, the mind and heart of God.

It is good to speak *God*. It is *very* good to speak *God*. Forever we will proclaim and praise and express gratitude to God, as did the apostles. But the God we praise and serve would have us focus *primarily* on His Son. Because it was His Son who became an utterly despised person on our behalf. Because it was His Son who accepted the nails and the thorns and the whip and the rods and the spittle and the humiliation. Because it was His Son who bore our sins in His body on the tree.

Now let's talk balance….

The New Testament 'speaks' the word *God* often, and 'speaks' the name of Jesus Christ slightly more often, the ratio close to one-to-one. If we factor in all references to Christ the Christ-to-God ratio is much higher. The New Testament's "I" and "Him" and "He" and "His" and "Me" are most often in reference to Christ. And if we count titles to Christ – "Lord", "Lamb of God", "Son of God", "Son of Man", "Teacher", "Master", etc. – we can see that the New Testament references the Lord Jesus at least twice as often as His Father and the Holy Spirit combined.

If the New Testament ratio of Christ-to-God is two-to-one, the healthiest ratio for christians is also two-to-one. But two-to-one is rare within evangelicalism. The typical evangelical at the coffee shop and the typical evangelical behind the pulpit do not come close to this New Testament precedent.

The Christ-to-God ratio in Christ's North American church could be as low as one-to-twenty. Perhaps lower, perhaps higher, only God knows. The observant could easily detect a major discrepancy between the Bible and most evangelicals.

The two-to-one christian is more fruitful than the one-to-two. Both are more successful than the one-to-five, one-to-ten, etc.

We do know Paul and Peter and John, New Testament writers, spoke *Christ* lots. We also know the three bore much good fruit….

Paul: *God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.* (Acts 19:11,12)

Peter: *They brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.* (Acts 5:15)

John: *Through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.* (Acts 5:12)

Do these three apostles establish a connection between "signs and wonders" and a healthy Christ-to-God ratio? Could it be that a lack of "signs and wonders" is due to a scarcity of Christ within christianity as indicated by a scarcity of *The Name*? Could it be that "signs and wonders" will come if we notably increase the times we speak *Christ*?

It must be said, a *Jesus* christian (a one-to-one or better) who affiliates chiefly with *God* christians (one-to-ten or worse) is in serious danger of becoming a *God* christian.

And it must be said, a *God* christian can become a *Jesus* christian. Such an accomplishment will take a real determined effort. Old habits do not easily die.

We often hear, "Praise the Lord!", but seldom hear, "Praise the Lord Jesus!"

Perhaps you have often prayed for grace to love Jesus more. Speaking His name consistently, privately and publicly, will cause that to happen.

T H E S I S # 32

Since evangelicalism seriously affects the relationship between Christ and evangelicals, evangelicals would be wise to examine evangelicalism.

Though this logic is simple sanity, it is dodged by most.

As it would be reasonable for the catholic christian to investigate catholicism, and as it would be wise for the lutheran christian to examine lutheranism, wouldn't it be likewise reasonable and wise for the evangelical to investigate evangelicalism?

It's obvious the catholic and lutheran who discovered Christ and embraced His salvation will be adversely affected by their religions. Both catholicism and lutheranism will soon replace Christ as *First Love*. Evangelicals could use these religions, and others, as mirrors to see their own predicament because….

Because likewise evangelicalism has countless times replaced Jesus Christ with itself as *First Love*.

Now it must be hurriedly repeated: Not all christians attending an evangelical church are evangelicals (though most are). An evangelical is more than an attendee; he is an attendee who has adopted evangelical traditions. It is possible to attend and yet maintain freedom (though some churches make such an endeavor burdensome).

And it should also be said examining one's religion could upset life considerably. Catholicism,

lutheranism, evangelicalism, and most other religions are cohesive agents binding family members. Actually, the more rigid one's religion, the tighter the family bond. A family that's united has many advantages over the family that's divided. Scrutiny of the bonding agent, whatever it is, would surely threaten family unity.

A couple enslaved to a strict religious system is likely to raise obedient, submissive, and respectful children. They will bind their children to their religion, thus binding them to themselves. Though together in bondage, they are together. There will be many happy family gatherings throughout the decades if all continue to submit to the same spiritual 'authority'.

It is this love of family and friends that keeps many from embracing "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". One instinctively knows Christ causes upheaval. ("I did not come to bring peace but a sword.") This attachment to family and friends keeps religionists from inspecting their religions. They will cling to the unreasonable and unwarranted and untrue rather than rattle *the-way-it-is* cage.

There are several advantages to attending an evangelical church. There are also dangers. The odds of an attendee evolving into a bona fide evangelical are overwhelming. (An evangelical is one who places the traditions of evangelicalism – of which there are many – over *The Word*.)

Two new converts to the Lord Jesus, husband and wife, timidly enter an evangelical church for the first time, five minutes before sunday service. Immediately they have a decision to make: *Where do we sit?* There are a few empty chairs on the elevated platform but obviously those are not for them. Everyone is sitting in the long pews, so they quickly conclude that's where they belong. *Hmmm. Can we sit in any pew, front or back? Or does everyone have a designated spot?* An usher comes to their rescue before panic sets in: *Please follow me.* Soon they are safely seated.

During this first visit they have been taught, non-verbally, they belong in a pew. Like most everyone else, they are destined to be pew people. The chairs up front, it seems, are reserved for the extraordinary, the spiritually superior.

It takes only a few sundays for husband and wife to realize there are two classes in this evangelical church system: the (few) rulers and the (many) ruled. The pulpit people are talkers, the pew people are listeners. The trusting new converts assume *the way it is* is the way it should be, God's preference.

As sundays roll by there is a subtle seduction occurring. An interloper is slowly positioning itself between the two young believers and Jesus Christ. With each service loyalty and dependence and affection are being transferred from Him to the officers of *the way it is.*

In time it will be thoroughly ingrained in their souls they are not meant to be a Peter or a Paul or a John. They are pew people. God simply does not expect them to do exploits in His Son's name. They will shrivel under the weight of the prevailing herd mentality that insists that whatever is done is done in unison, and this always under the supervision of pulpit people.

Young converts should, but don't, compare the evangelical way to Bible standards, trusting instead in the wisdom of those of seniority. And those of seniority should, but won't, challenge evangelicalism for authenticity because that could upset life considerably.

The catholic who has the courage to challenge catholicism would soon cease being a catholic. Same with the lutheran. Same with the evangelical. The evangelical, because he professes confidence in the Bible, could be judged (at the judgment seat of Christ) more strictly. "Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required."

T H E S I S # 33

Refusing to examine evangelicalism under Bible light is certain evidence evangelicalism is an idol. (An idol is that which has captured one's focus and loyalty.)

Mark 7:5: *Then the Pharisees and scribes asked , "Why do your disciples not walk according to the traditions of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"*

The pharisees liked to wash things – "cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches" as well as their hands. We are not talking cleanliness but ritual, "traditions of the elders". The twelve submitted to these traditions (as did all jews) until they became Christ's disciples.

Disciples of Christ, because they are disciples of Christ, live under tension. No doubt the biggies scowled at the apostles at every opportunity. No doubt eager and dutiful underlings added their scowls to those of their overlords.

The twelve were in a squeeze. They could either appease the religious leaders and offend *The Master,* or honor *The Master* and offend the religious lords. Had they chosen man over Christ, the Bible could not have correctly described them as disciples of Christ.

A disciple is higher than a convert. A disciple of Christ is a convert who has proved himself obedient. Because he lives down here the convert is often in a squeeze, having to choose between Christ's words and other words. It has always been that way, it is that way, it will always be that way. To avoid ostracism, the convert merely has to place his loyalty upon the accepted. To choose Christ is to invite ostracism.

According to Lord Jesus, the religious lords were "hypocrites", "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men". Does this mean *everyone* who knowingly teaches "as doctrines…. commandments of men" are hypocrites?

Can the word *hypocrite* be defined as a person who knowingly distorts God's teachings while suggesting this distortion is authored by God?

Isaiah quotes our God regarding people who replace God's Word with another: *This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me.*

They worship God, but in vain. Their worship contains lofty sayings, but God is not impressed.

Two gatherings of christians are praising the Lord Jesus in different locations, one group consisting of converts, the other disciples. Which group, do you think, is more passionate? Has more power? Pleases the Lord?

Mark 7:7 (NLT): *Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.*

Most 'christian' religions are built upon "man-made ideas" that are accepted "as commands of God". Evangelicalism is certainly no exception.

A disciple has no need for religion. "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" is her sufficiency.

The twelve could not serve both the religious lords and the Lord Jesus. Keeping traditions contrary to Christ is contrary to Christ. A disciple of tradition is antithetic to a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark 7:10: *For Moses said, "Honor your father and mother"; and "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death."*

Everyone knew there was (and is) a self-inflicted curse upon anyone dumb enough to curse Dad and Mom, and everyone also knew there was a blessing for those who blessed their parents. ("Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life.")

But the religious leaders insisted on something entirely opposite: "Tell Dad and Mom instead of supporting them you will give the money it costs to do so 'to the temple'." Lord Jesus challenged these biggies….

Mark 7:11-13: *"But you say, 'If a man says to his father and mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"' - (that is, dedicated to the temple); and you no longer let him do anything for his father and his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition."*

This confrontation with "the Pharisees and some of the scribes" was a public affair. Use your imagination to bounce backwards into history, and place yourself in that crowd. More than that, become one of them.

You find yourself squeezed. Your respected and feared religious lords have been exposed by none other than the Miracle-worker, the One claiming to be the very Son of God. Lord Jesus used Scripture, which you have been taught to reverence, to denounce an accepted tradition.

You have been raised to believe in this traditional teaching, and even relayed it to others. What the religious VIPs said was true, always and entirely. Your confidence was fastened to them and their God-given insights and decrees.

And now your world is suddenly shaken. You have always been a religious person immersed in a religious society. Your religion binds you to your people who, like all people, are superior in understanding. Your security is packaged in *them*, and the head of *them* are the pharisees…. now

being crushed by this Nazarene.

And it gets worse….

Mark 7: 13: *And many such things you do.*

What things? you wonder.

To know, compare each of their hundreds of accepted teachings to Scripture. It's just that simple. You will discover some are legitimate (Scriptural), but most are not. Being a jew, you have a decent knowledge of *The Word*, so the task is not overly burdensome. Just compare what leadership says to what the Old Testament says.

But will you?

Such a scrutiny would upset life completely. Your religious kingdom would certainly be "found wanting" as you discover most of what you believed is false. You must accept the painful reality your trusted leaders have led you astray. All this will, to repeat, upset life completely.

An escape from this predicament is to simply ignore Christ's truth. Distance yourself from Him and His words. Leave things as are. Convince yourself you just don't understand. And change the subject.

When truth collides with beloved tradition and threatens to dethrone beloved traditionalist leadership our immediate concern is: *What will this truth cost me? Would 'they' disapprove?*

We have a built-in defense mechanism against truth. *Potential* idols are first responders intent on defending *the way it is*, presenting an assortment of arguments and excuses why truth should be denied entrance into our lives.

A *potential* idol is not an idol, and won't become one until it is chosen over Christ.

It is hard to imagine most in that crowd dared to compare. The price of Christ was too much for all but a few. Those few could be classed with the twelve – *disciples* of Christ.

Now bounce back into today and, with an improved perspective, look around. Are you surrounded by converts or disciples?

We are obligated to bring everything under Bible light (as the most Holy Spirit so directs). That which we refuse to examine (if and when the Holy Spirit prompts) is a protected idol, a foreign thing that has captured our focus and loyalty.

T H E S I S # 34

As loyalty to Christ is evidenced by loyalty to the Bible, so loyalty to evangelicalism is evidenced by loyalty to evangelical traditions. Neither centuries of observance nor endorsement of most validates non-Biblical practices.

Love serves. Obedience authenticates love. Words come easy, but submission is the litmus test.

Praise isn't a song, but rather compliance. Worship isn't saying, but doing. Calling Him "Lord" doesn't make Him Lord.

A faithful husband says, "I love you, wife." An unfaithful husband says, "I love you, wife." A wife may not discern her husband's heart, but Jesus knows all hearts.

If Lord Jesus has been shuffled from first place to second He knows the hour, the minute, the very second that silent betrayal has occurred in one's treasonous heart. Jesus knows us thoroughly.

Because there are different depths of sincerity, there are different depths of obedience. One doesn't love much and obey little. One doesn't love little and obey much. Praise from the obedient is incense to our most precious Redeemer. To the disobedient He says, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

Jesus knows us, but we know not ourselves. We think we do, but we don't. "The heart is deceitful above all things." Not only have we fooled them, we have fooled ourselves. But He knows where our loyalty is set, be it on Him or another.

Love comes by gazing. That which we look upon will eventually capture us. It's impossible to look upon our Christ without bonding to our Christ. A steadfast gaze will renovate the most crooked heart.

Likewise, gazing upon another will draw us to another. It's so easy to become distracted by the glamorous and charismatic and esteemed. Man-sanctioned leaders in Christ's church (some?, many?, most?) actually compete against Jesus for our affection and loyalty. This is not intentional, not even realized. The heart behind the pulpit is no less deceived than the hearts lined up ever-so-orderly in the pews.

The pupliteer who is not a Christ-gazer is a dangerous man. All man-worshippers, all builders, all religiously ambitious christians are dangerous, but the pulpit-man is highly influential. Though armed with a Bible, it is someone or something else he exalts.

It is easier to devote ourselves to those we can see and hear and touch than the One we cannot see and hear and touch. It is more natural to walk by sight than by faith. Because "the heart is deceitful above all things" we can assume Christ has our devotion when He doesn't. Be He second love or fifth, we convince ourselves He is first.

To know our heart we must test our heart. The litmus tester is the Bible. Our loyalty to "the head of the church" is proved by loyalty to God's words to us.

Throughout church history *The Word* has been challenged by other words. There have always been confused and/or debased adders and subtracters and exchangers. Many times their devotees, often humble and dutiful and sincere, have been (and are) numbered in the millions.

With every passing decade *the way it is* becomes more solidly entrenched. There is something about longevity that elevates credibility. And as the ranks swell credibility further swells. So many can't be so wrong for so long.

Eventually confidence in *the way it is* surpasses confidence in the Bible. This is not an uncommon happening, even among evangelicals who do not hesitate to declare the infallibility of Scripture.

Martin Luther confronted an evil system that became an evil system because multitudes, over previous centuries, shirked their duty. Luther wasn't the first scholar to read, "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." Some of those guys knew the Bible much better than we do.

A perusal of church history reveals every generation had an infiltration of misconceptions and outright substitutes of Bible truths. Because those generations failed to stand guard against bogus teachings, downstream believers were also infected.

What will we pass on to those downstream in church history from us? Will we have the conviction to sift the vile from the beautiful, the false from the true, the harmful from the beneficial? Will we, by example, influence our spiritual seed to build on the rock of Christ's sayings or the sand of tradition?

Someone is keeping a record, and each of us will soon give a public account to Jesus our Christ.

T H E S I S # 35

Evangelicals choosing evangelical traditions over Bible teachings have a feeble relationship with Jesus.

So how does an evangelical transition back from feeble to dynamic? Simple. Just reverse the trends that made the relationship feeble.

Simple, but it will be a challenge.

We won't go after what we don't want sufficiently. Intelligent consideration of Christ will leave every christian seriously wanting a meaningful relationship with the number one Person in the entire universe. Anything other would be unreasonable and unsatisfactory.

Quality of relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ must be paramount. Better comes only by wanting better. Think improvement. Allow no lower ambition to surpass the holy endeavor of gaining more of Him. If better is not the goal the opposite - deterioration - will result.

Increase is the natural objective of the eternally minded. Those who can see beyond today will be desperate for a healthier attachment to "the true vine" because only the life of Lord Jesus flowing into the branches will make the branches fruitful. We're not talking earth fruit that decays, but spiritual fruit preserved eternally.

The eternally minded realize earth-life is but a moment compared to heaven-life. Thus they refuse to live for today, and willingly forego comfort and leisure and inclusion to gain a wealthier tomorrow. New Jerusalem should be a daily consideration: purity, order, sanity, the "cloud of witnesses", angels of various rank and glory, the throne of God, and many more heavenly delights. It would be life-changing to daily focus on that day we will see the "King of kings and Lord of Lords" face to face.

The eternally minded have been impacted by the reality of heaven and hell, two eternal residences for every man, woman, and child. Man's desperate need for salvation has gripped their heart, and they refuse distractions. They know salvations come only through a healthy bond to Christ. ("Without Me you can do nothing.")

It wasn't attendance that made the evangelical an evangelical, but the adaption of evangelical traditions. Like the *before* Galatians – the Galatians before embracing the traditions of the circumcisers - the *before* evangelical was doing well. He was a healthy born-again. Paul would say to him, "Who has bewitched you?"

To escape feeble, to regain dynamic, one simply needs to repent of shifting Lord Jesus from *First Love* to something less, and return to His lordship. Such is the "wise man who built his house on the rock".

T H E S I S # 36

Evangelicalism would bear much more good fruit if it discarded traditions contrary to the Bible. There are many such traditions.

Traditions can be expensive, and are often financed by funds the Lord Jesus intended for *The Great Commission*.

Evangelicalism suggests evangelicals can do more for God's kingdom en masse than individually. This is a costly miscalculation.

Before His return our Lord Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit who "would guide you into all truth". The book of *Acts* is the shortened term for *Acts of the Apostles*, but some suggest it should be called *Acts of the Holy Spirit* because of the involvement of the Holy Spirit during those significant times. For example….

Chapter ten tells us while Peter was contemplating his vision ("heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners descended to him and….") "the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'" The Holy Spirit had sent men from Caesarea to Peter, and also told Peter the men were coming to get him. Further, while Peter was preaching to the brethren at Caesarea "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word."

Chapter sixteen reveals the Holy Spirit giving direction to Paul and Silas. They intended to "preach

the word in Asia", but "they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach" there. Later Paul received a vision: "A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" Paul complied with the vision.

The difference between these apostles and us, generally speaking, is a lack of sensitivity and submission to the Holy Spirit. That explains our comparatively skimpy results.

And why is the evangelical so lacking of sensitivity toward the Holy Spirit? Blame evangelicalism. Evangelicalism has replaced the Holy Spirit with itself as the guiding force of Christ's people. The evangelical has lost his ability to hear what the Spirit is saying because he is overly concerned with what evangelicalism is saying.

How different is the *Acts of the Apostles* from the acts of evangelicalism!

Evangelicalism has, over the centuries, built a cumbersome (and expensive) hierarchy controlling millions of believers throughout its many denominations. Denominational officers in local churches are instructed to bring its membership and adherents into submission to denominational beliefs and decrees, and affect a dependence on them for guidance (regarding public ministry).

To justify this hierarchy, it seems their (convenient) understanding of Christ's words, "He will guide you into all truth" is: "The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth by revealing truth *to us* who in turn will convey those truths *to you* through our endorsed and faithful local officers."

This is harmful policy. They would have all rely on those credited by themselves for direction instead of seeking direction directly from the Holy Spirit. What could be more damaging to the Spirit-believer relationship? And since it is actually our Christ relating to us through the Holy Spirit ("the Spirit of Jesus Christ"), looking to another for direction is actually looking *away* from Jesus.

They certainly agree and teach there is "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus", but seem to assume they are God-ordained mediators between men and the Holy Spirit (and thus men and Christ).

It would be hard to contrive a concept more damaging to *The Great Commission*. When our Lord said, "without Me you can do nothing" He was speaking of relationship. A weakened relationship equals a weakened branch, and a weakened branch equals paltry fruit.

Denominational headquarters decrees: *We can do together what we can't do by ourselves; unity is our strength.* And yet….

And yet John the Baptist was a loner. Lord Jesus sent out the twelve and the seventy two by two. Paul sometimes travelled his missionary trips alone, sometimes with one other. He accomplished much when alone as a prisoner. John was by himself when he received the great *Revelation* that still impacts Christ's church. Peter was alone "on the housetop" when he received instructions to preach the Holy Spirit to gentiles.

Young John told Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." This "someone", this "him", this "he" was a singular person. Jesus' correction to John ("Do not forbid him….") is also a correction to today's religious establishment that suggests we must have the blessing of a church to do ministry.

The woman "who was a sinner" did not ask anyone's permission when she "brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil" to wash her Christ's feet. It is easy to imagine she was inspired and emboldened by the Holy Spirit.

Phillip (not the apostle) was alone when sent by "an angel of the Lord" to the Ethiopian, "a eunuch of great authority". "The Spirit said to Phillip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.'" Notice, "the Spirit *said"* to Phillip. The Holy Spirit still speaks to individuals who have "ears to hear".

Potentially we are each a Paul, a Peter, a John. Who would stop us from continually gaining Christ until we had a relationship equal to theirs? Again, who would stop us? Certainly not our Lord Jesus. Certainly not our Father. Certainly not our Holy Spirit.

If a congregation of believers busied itself supporting one another in their individual calling and giftings instead of organizing themselves into goosestep togetherness, instead of investing time and energy creating an inefficient contingent, God's kingdom would be better extended and maintained.

God's specific will for each of His own is a holy thing. Respecting that holy thing is respecting God.

Galatians 6:2: *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Our biggest burden should be to accomplish the specific will of God, to complete our assignment. True friends will support us in our endeavor. A friend "in Christ" will point us to Christ by preaching Christ. With Christ we can; without Christ we can't. One person finishing "the race" would result in many (yes, many!) being saved from you-know-where.

Manipulating a brother or sister to fit into a program or to support an alternative to God's way is serious callousness. Evangelicalism is not interested in the individual's commission, but rather collective ministry. The army they have built is clumsy and inefficient and expensive, and largely detrimental to *The Great Commission.* Sad.

T H E S I S # 37

The dividing of Christ's church into two groups, the clergy (or ministerial) and laity (laymen), is a harmful, non-Biblical practice.

For those who haven't noticed the schism of saints evidenced in their own spiritual backyard, the annual or biennial leadership conference held by most denominations, whereby some are invited and others are not, should be ample proof of the division within evangelicalism.

The pharisees (and others) were the 'clergy' (or 'ministerial') in Christ's day. Studying them is studying

the human heart. To a degree, they are us. Yes, we experienced a dynamic spiritual shift when first "born of the Spirit", but still retain lots of yuck. Who we are is much better than who we were, yet who we were has blemished and bruised who we are.

Jeremiah 17:5 (NLT): *This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans."*

Others cannot trust us and we cannot trust others. None are fully trustworthy. And yet we work hard at getting people to trust our character and perspectives. The clergy/ministerial assumes they are worthy of our trust, and yet the very existence of this non-Biblical ruling class is proof of their unworthiness and inability to shepherd.

When *The Christ* exposed the pharisees He exposed the heart of man. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Our hearts have similarities to theirs. So let's be really, really brave and peer into the pharisee heart to get glimpses of our own.

Matthew 23:13: "*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites."*

Lord Jesus called the pharisees hypocrites, which leads to a most important question….

Did the hypocrite make the pharisee, or did the pharisee make the hypocrite?

Is it possible to be a member of a ruling class, be it secular or christian, without assimilating a sense of elitism? Who cannot be ill affected by undue reverence, by titles, by special consideration?

Man-gazing was a reality then and a reality today, repugnant though it be. It takes a special person to be both humble and adulated. We naively assume the man behind the pulpit has somehow, at some time, attained a place of spiritual eminence whereby he is immune from the ill effects of fawning…. but is he? When did he make the transition from not-so-special to special, from susceptible to invulnerable? Was it upon graduation from Bible school? When he received his denominational certificate? When he landed his first job? At his 'ordination'? Just exactly when did he become special…. wiser, holier, anointed?

Or do these externals simply give an *appearance* of superiority?

John 9:22 (NLT): *They were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue.*

The pharisees were serious controllers. Anyone ejected from the synagogue would undergo upheaval of every aspect of life, and they used this leverage against those daring to express an opposing view. How cruel the heart of a controller.

A controller is one having a need to control. It's a sickness, a bad fruit of the fall. A controller in the church is at odds with the Holy Spirit who *guides*. ("He *will guide* you into all truth.") One guided by the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled by man, and one controlled by man cannot be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps this need to control is in most of us. As there are degrees of all good and bad traits, there are degrees of a need to control. Marriages are often a battleground because of one's abnormal need to control the other.

Most of us are not, as were the pharisees, control *freaks*.

There is a sick pleasure in dominating others. The unsanctified heart loves power and loves money, and a control freak always wants more of both. That's why a freak often becomes the c.e.o. of the company. That's what compels him to reach for the top of whatever occupation and organization he is in. He wants people under him, not over him.

A control freak is not necessarily the smartest, but often the most ambitious. When the most ambitious in the church is also the smartest the results are catastrophic. Now back to….

Matthew 23:13: *"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites."*

Not all pharisees were pharisaic, but we must accept most were. Nicodemus who humbly questioned Jesus about the salvation He promoted, and Joseph, "a good and just man", who requested Pilate for the body of Jesus to be laid in his own tomb (to the serious displeasure of his colleagues) were seemingly exceptions.

But why were the bulk of pharisees hypocritical? The law of average suggests much less than half would be so artificial.

Matthew 23:5-7 (NLT): *"Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels. And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues. They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi.'"*

Sounds like a bunch of narcissists.

Why, oh why were so many in such need of prominence and adulation? Did they all have inept parents? Were they not loved as children and teens? They had memorized more Scripture than a dozen of us together; shouldn't that have positively affected their character?

Luke 16:14: *The Pharisees, who were lovers of money…*

Sure, we all have an unhealthy attraction to money, but it seems these guys loved money *intensely*. Caiaphas lived "in the palace". Leadership "devour widows' houses" and insisted people give money used for the care of aging parents "to the (ahem!) temple". Why such an uncommon love for money?

Luke 16:14: *They derided Him.*

These guys were practiced mockers. And they were extremely cruel, actually scoffing at (what had the appearance of) a helpless, tortured victim nailed to a cross, barely clinging to life. ("The rulers…. sneered, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself.'") Somehow these gentlemen became

seriously twisted over the years.

But *how* and *why* did these religious leaders become the despots they were? - hypocritical, controlling, narcissistic, obsessive of money and power, derisive and cruel. Perhaps the answer is simpler than we might think, an answer we have heard more than once over the years….

Power corrupts! Power corrupts! Power corrupts!

Does power corrupt *everybody* in places of power and authority?

Luke 23:50-53: *There was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their council and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb.*

Joseph is proof power doesn't corrupt all. There are survivors. But the pharisees have taught us the dangers of the leadership side (the clergy/ministerial side) of organized religion. Catholicism, with its long history of unbelievable corruption, and other religions, echo the same dangers.

It would be a mistake to compare christians – "born of the Spirit", washed in the blood of the Lamb, sanctified, justified, sons and daughters of the living God – with non-christian pharisees. But it is folly to refuse to be warned by others who have tread similar paths.

T H E S I S # 38

The notion that a few are to spiritually equip the many is contrary to Ephesians 4:16: the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body.

So who "causes growth of the body"? "The *whole body*…. causes growth of the body."

You are part of "the whole body". "The whole body" consists of pew people and pulpit people. Everyone.

Ephesians 4:11 (NLT): *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,*

Ephesians 4:12 (NLT): *to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*

Ephesians 4:13 (NLT): *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:14 (NLT): *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

Ephesians 4:15 (NLT): *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

Ephesians 4:16 (NLT): *He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy, and growing and full of love.*

In these six verses Paul is relaying Christ's instructions to the Ephesians and, indirectly, to you. No place in New Testament writings did the Holy Spirit so explicitly teach us the intent of "the head of the church", both the intended outcome of His people and the ways and means of obtaining that outcome.

What is the outcome?

Your intended outcome is to be prepared "for works of service", to be united with others "in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God", to be a "mature" disciple of Christ, and to actually attain "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ".

For what purpose?

You will no longer be "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." Instead, your ability to teach ("speaking truth") will steadily increase. More than that, you the branch will be strengthened in your attachment to *The True Vine* ("in all things grow up into him").

How is this accomplished?

"As each part does its own work, it helps the other parts grow." You as much as anyone have a part in Christ's program of maturing His people. You are a "part". You have your "own special work" to accomplish. Others will be blessed by your compliance to Christ's way of doing things.

Is Christ being obeyed?

No. The evangelical way is quite dissimilar to Christ's way. Evangelicalism is controlled by approximately 2% of evangelicals. (Most other religions are no better.) 98% submit to the 2%, not to New Testament writings (and thus not to Lord Jesus). The 2%, who are salaried by the 98%, forbid the 98% access to the pulpit.

The controllers will allow the controlled to lead a Bible study or supervise a sunday school class, but only if they faithfully follow a study guide written by someone within the 2%.

How did it get to be this way?

History is proof the dividing of people into rulers and ruled is a natural occurrence. That's just the way we are. Evangelicalism is a mimic of catholicism and other seasoned religions. It takes an uncommon love and appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ to thrust oneself above man's way into the loftier sphere of Christ's way.

T H E S I S # 39

Choosing the licensed over the anointed has always been a practice of evangelicalism.

This "practice of evangelicalism" is actually the practice of the 2%. They call the shots. The chances that the most anointed preacher in the congregation is in the 2% group instead of the 98% group are mathematically very slim. Yet *the way it is* insists only the licensed can preach the word sunday morning.

How can it be that 2% control 98%?

The 2% ministerial are organized and the 98% 'laity' are not. This gives the 2% considerable leverage. The 2% have control of the pulpit; they who control the pulpit control the church. (See note.)

Is it working?

To determine the worth of the evangelical way, one simply needs to observe evangelicals. The measurement can't be activity, not organizational skills, not quantity of prayer, or size of congregation. The measurement must be *quality of relationship* between evangelicals and the Lord Jesus Christ. If one determines the relationship to be healthy one can conclude that, yes, it is working. But if the answer is no then the answer is no.

But isn't leadership a good thing?

Leadership is a very good thing. *Organized* leadership is a very bad thing.

The father in the family is a leader. But organizing the fathers in the neighborhood to collectively give leadership to their families is a bad thing. It is not God's way.

A disciple of Christ is a christian who has given himself over to obedience to Christ. An evangelical is a christian who has given himself over to obedience to evangelicalism. The evangelicals most firmly tethered to evangelicalism are in the ministerial.

Every disciple of Christ is a good leader. Quality leadership is leading by example and by speaking "the truth in love".

What is Christ's way?

Christ's way is "one another" ministry….

Romans 14:19 (NLT): *Let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build* each other *up.*

1 Corinthians 3:10: *I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let* each one *take heed how he builds on it.*

1 Corinthians 12:7: *The manifestation of the Spirit is given* to each one *for the profit of all.*

1 Corinthians 12:8: To one *is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit,* to another *the word of*

knowledge.

1 Corinthians 12:10: To another *prophecy,* to another *discerning of spirits,* to another *different kinds of tongues,* to another *the interpretation of tongues.*

1 Corinthians 12:11: *One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing* to each one *individually as He wills.*

1 Corinthians 12:25: *There should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for* one another.

1 Corinthians 14:26: *Whenever you come together,* each of you *has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation.*

1 Corinthians 14:31: *You can all prophecy* one by one, *that all may learn and be encouraged.*

1 Corinthians 14:39: Brethren, *desire earnestly to prophesy.*

Ephesians 4:16: *The whole body, joined and knit together by what* every joint *supplies, according to the effective working by which* every part *does its share, causes growth of the body.*

Ephesians 5:19: *Speaking to* one another *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*

Colossians 3:16: *Teaching and admonishing* one another.

Hebrews 10:25: *Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting* one another.

1 Peter 4:10: *As each one has received a gift, minister it to* one another.

Combined, these verses make a serious indictment against the very existence of the 2% ministerial. The evangelical way is contrary to Christ's way. If the ministerial really was *God*, it would have *God* stamped on it throughout the New Testament. It doesn't.

Paul's letters to the churches were directed to the 100%. The 2% aren't mentioned because in his mind they didn't exist. Same with the 98%; they also didn't exist.

So what's the answer?

The answer is an open pulpit. The ideal is the Holy Spirit speaking through His choice whenever He chooses. With Him there is no partisanship, credentials are meaningless, all would have equal opportunity.

But is an open pulpit practical… possible?

An open pulpit must be a protected pulpit, protected by a few simple rules determined by all, and protected by serious prayer. If the world can send men to the moon surely evangelicals can figure out how to have a protected open pulpit in their services. Nothing works perfectly, but an open

pulpit would be a vast improvement over a solo ministry.

Will we ever see an open pulpit in the evangelical church?

Probably not. An open pulpit would actually be the doom of evangelicalism. Justifying the existence of the ministerial would be difficult as the laity begin to understand they are not laity and the credentialed have no special rank.

So what does a 'layman' do?

Repent. The answer to most, if not all, problems is repentance.

Galatians 5:1: *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

The layman was free ("Christ has made us free") and returned "again with the yoke of bondage". He who was yoked to Christ by Christ allowed himself to be yoked to another by another. If one has allowed others to label him, to dictate to him, to direct his life, he simply has to place himself, again, under the lordship of "the head of the church".

Christ's preachers do not need evangelicalism to provide an audience. "The fields are already ripe for harvest." There is a shortage of able laborers, those dedicated solely to "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". If every evangelical committed his/her christianity solely to Christ much more fruit would be forthcoming. "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit."

A layman must cease being a layman. His thinking must be Christ's thinking: In Christ's church there are no classes, no division, no 2%, and no 98%.

And the salaried minister?

The answer is the same: repentance. He, too, has exchanged the lordship of Christ and the governance of the Holy Spirit for the lordship of man, his ecclesiastical superiors. The christian serving christians will possibly (probably?) never hear those words we should all ache to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

Note: *Pulpit Power* is a full-length novel (available at larryjones.ca) intended to demonstrate the power of the pulpit in the local church. Starring in *Pulpit Power* are Pastor Mac, his wife Vivian, their two teens, Katie and Kyle, and Roo the plumber, his wife Jenny, their son John Douglas, and Tree and his family, and the board of elders at *Bryden Falls Community Christian Center*, and the *Challengers* baseball team, and some etceteras. The setting for *Pulpit Power* is Bryden Falls, "skirting the Canada-U.S. border, somewhere in western Canada".

T H E S I S # 40

Non-Biblical words familiar to evangelicals - such as membership, denominations, program,

covering, seminary, senior pastor, home church, ministerial, and many others – reveal a wide chasm between evangelicalism and the Bible.

Matthew 7:14 (NIV): *Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.*

Within the "narrow…. road" (within christianity) is a narrow road. Ten virgins were on the narrow road, but only five were on the narrow road (the road of faithfulness to *First Love*) within the narrow road.

Within the "narrow…. road" (within christianity) there is also a heavily populated wide road. On this road reside the majority, those who have shuffled Lord Jesus from first place to a lesser place.

Both the narrow and the wide road lead to the same location – the judgment seat of Christ. At this time and place the value of everyone's eternity will be revealed and established. How narrow is narrow?…. the judgment seat will reveal it. How wide is wide?…. the judgment seat will reveal it.

If those on the wide road, which leads to a vast and eternal loss, realized it was the wide road they travelled, they would make, one would think, a quick transfer to the narrow road, which leads to a vast and eternal wealth.

Narrow road, wide road – how does one know?

The answer is found in our speech. Our words reveal the road we travel. What we say unlocks the secrets of the heart. It doesn't take much listening to know where one's enthusiasm and love has been placed.

All began their christianity on the narrow road where passion for Him overflows. But many found the narrow road hard and lonely, and the wide road seemed more appealing and less demanding. A distant Jesus takes less courage and effort than an up-close Jesus. So the transfer from one road to the other was made silently in the heart of most.

With a transfer comes a change of vocabulary.

When the Holy Spirit invaded catholicism in the '70s and '80s – this known as the catholic charismatic movement – it didn't take long for strange doctrines to weave themselves throughout the movement. And with strange doctrines came strange words – *charismatic, group discernment, submission to (spiritual) authority, rebellious (to authority), discipleship, covering, headship, core group, community, renewal, etcetera.*

The encroachment of curious teachings, packaged in curious words, came through preachers (*certified* preachers, mostly) - in person, and via books and audio tapes – and was probably the main cause of the collapse of one of the most profound visitations of God in church history. Had everyone in the catholic charismatic movement stuck to the language of the Bible it would still be the mighty force it once was.

A preacher, we assume, is one who preaches the gospel or some spiritual truth. Not entirely so….

Galatians 3:1: *Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?*

That "who" was a preacher.

Acts 20:29: *I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*

Those "salvage wolves" Paul referenced were preachers.

Acts 15:5 (NLT): *Some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."*

Those guys were preachers.

A preacher does not always preach the truth.

Most of Christ's own within evangelicalism travel the wide road, this made evident by evangelical conversations peppered with words foreign to Christ's words and ways. Preachers (and certainly other influences) are responsible for the heavy pedestrian traffic. Humility and repentance will bring anyone back to the narrow road where Christ's unadulterated truths reign and Godly enthusiasm overflows.

We are all preachers, sometimes for the good and sometimes not. When our speech is colored with words not found in Scripture we should suspect our perspectives. Deviant words seriously damage us and those we cherish/influence.

When Christ returns there will be millions, perhaps billions, of born-again believers in His church. Yet Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Yes, our Lord Jesus will find faith on that narrow road within the "narrow…. road" where His faithful walk out their earth-years.

T H E S I S # 41

Denominations are non-Biblical and therefore contrary to Christ. The ruling structure of evangelicalism mimics the business enterprise. No early-church christian attended a denominational church as we know it.

There are hundreds of protestant denominations throughout the world. This isn't an indication of spirituality, but rather evidence of man's itch to build and his need to scratch that itch.

A denomination evolved as one church became two and two became ten and ten became a denomination. Having churches stand alone with only the Holy Spirit to guide them is scary. Big is better. Big is safer.

Often a denomination splits and becomes two. And splits again to become three or four. Life among builders and controllers is often dysfunctional as they jockey for status and relevance.

As a denomination grows so does its influence. Increased influence equals increased power. With power comes corruption. Always. Little power, little corruption. Lots of power, lots of corruption.

Denominations were created through compromise. The 2% ministerial added to and subtracted from *The Word*, altered some parts and ignored others, until another denomination, with its own blend of peculiarities and distinctives and perspectives, was birthed. Compromise gave it life, and compromise glues the pieces together, and compromise maintains it.

Denominations professing the lordship of Christ actually compete with Christ for the loyalty of God's people. Their success has enfeebled millions of evangelicals (etcetera), which diminishes the urgency of Christ's great commission, which explains why "the way that leads to destruction" is still "broad" and "the way which leads to life" is still "narrow".

Since a denomination is not birthed by God it will never submit to the governance of the Holy Spirit. The folks collectively bow to rationalization, the same god that rules the world from which we were saved. In this ecclesiastical maze, the ordinary pour homage unto the exceptional who in turn pour homage unto the remarkable. Those in power bask in their power…. because power corrupts. Always.

The denomination placed one of their own behind the pulpit, and though the denominational lords cannot be seen, their influence blankets the congregators every gathering. The nervous heart of the pastor is more attuned to the officers above him than the people in his care.

From the pulpit comes a strong suggestion: *You need us.* The congregator who once leaned on the Holy Spirit for direction soon learns to lean on the organization. What can be more damaging to the Jesus-christian relationship?

Paul finished what he called "my race" only because he submitted to the Holy Spirit. Same with the eleven. Same with any true disciple of Christ. We have no hope of completing *our* race (our calling,

our assignment) except by an allegiance to the Holy Spirit akin to Paul's.

The strength of the local church comes from registered members, evangelicals fully surrendered to the causes of their corner of evangelicalism. More than insignificant adherents, they carry the financial burden of the church (and also support denominational headquarters). Will those investing much of their lives into making this thing work be satisfied at the judgment seat of Christ?

There is a much better way than church membership....

Have you heard the term *church hopping*? Church hopping is attending various churches instead of regularly attending one church. Though frowned upon by controllers, the church-hopper has a major advantage over the regulars. Not only does he get a healthy variety of perspectives, it is easier to dodge the religion and compromise that has ensnared the regular attenders.

A church-hopper is there for spiritual feeding from the pulpit and inspiration from the corporate praise and worship, nothing more. Her social requirements are necessarily established outside the church. He feeds the offering plate only as the Spirit of the Lord leads. They have no reason to read the church bulletin.

Leadership's disdain for church-hoppers reveals their true motives - which is not the welfare of the church-hopper, but control over his/her life. How can they supervise someone who only shows up occasionally? Church-hoppers make lousy building material for the ambitious builders.

Sometimes we fail to see the obvious: *The early church was profoundly fruitful, and yet denominations were not yet invented.* What does that tell us?

T H E S I S # 42

Most certainly, evangelicalism is not a creation of Jesus Christ. Within evangelicalism Christ is a symbolic lord only. Man, not Christ, is the decision-maker. Man, not Christ, is lord.

The only legitimate organization within the church of Jesus Christ is the family. The husband is the head of the family, the wife is under the husband, and the children are under both parents.

Ephesians 5:23: *The husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church.*

Ephesians 5:22: *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*

Ephesians 5:24: *Just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

Ephesians 6:1: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

Colossians 3:20: *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.*

This is simplicity. But….

But evangelicalism often blurs this simplicity, and makes the simple confusing.

Confusion is a product of an unholy mixture. Confusion finds access when God's simple instructions are blended with traditional contrivances. The ambassador of tradition behind the pulpit, Pastor Impressive, is often an illegitimate third party in the marriage and the entire family.

He slowly usurps, possibly in innocent unawareness, the spiritual authority of the husband over the wife. The husband notices, but assumes that's just the way it's supposed to be. In matters of serious concern she will bypass her husband and make an appointment with Pastor Impressive.

Pastor Impressive, you understand, must be the most able person in the church, someone having special rank with God. That's why he's behind the pulpit. That's why he's licensed. That's why he's salaried. Every service he becomes bigger, more impressive, as he churns out Godly wisdom from the god-maker (the pulpit). Husband is a pretty good plumber (or lawyer or accountant or whatever) but no match for Pastor Impressive in spiritual matters.

And the kids? From a very young age they are ushered away from Dad and Mom, away from their spiritual authority, to a sunday school class to learn about God. They see Dad and Mom light up in the presence of Pastor Impressive, a non-verbal teaching to the kids to give equal homage. Dad and Mom, while still the disciplinarians, become less and less a spiritual refuge and mentor.

Lord Jesus never created an organization, other than the family, within His church. All others within christianity were birthed from men doing religion outside the perimeters of God's will. As God did not create catholicism for catholics, or anglicanism for anglicans, or lutheranism for lutherans, so He did not create evangelicalism for evangelicals. And as catholicism created catholics, and anglicanism created anglicans, and lutheranism created lutherans, so did evangelicalism create evangelicals.

This should be obvious to every seeing, hearing evangelical…. but it's not.

Matthew 6:10: *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Up there there are no catholics, anglicans, lutherans, evangelicals, charismatics, pentecostals, baptists, presbyterians, or whatever. If they don't belong up there they surely don't belong down here.

When the Father looks upon mankind He sees two groups only: His kids (through Lord Jesus) and those He wants to be His kids. We should see only what our Father sees: His and not His.

When Jesus looks upon His church He doesn't see an evangelical (or whatever); He sees a blood-washed, blood-bought saint. He doesn't even see an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, even though every christian has been endowed with at least one of these ministry gifts. Our *Elder Brother* sees brothers and sisters. ("Go and tell My *brethren*….") We who attempt to imitate our Christ should have His eyesight.

We should see a precious brother or sister in Christ. We see a saint, a redeemed one. We do not see an evangelical or a pastor or a layman. We do not see an elder. We do not see a 'reverend'. We see a brother. We see a sister.

Within evangelicalism are many, perhaps most, of God's children. Within is the fivefold ministry. As Lord Jesus works through his gifted saints, one might conclude He is working through, and thus endorsing, evangelicalism. Not so.

Evangelicalism, with its titles and certifications and professional pulpiteers - as every other religion (evangelicalism *is* a religion) - contends with the Lord Jesus Christ for the hearts of its adherents. As such, Christ stands against it…. while standing with the evangelical.

Lord Jesus is not the lord of evangelicalism, man is. Lordship of Christ infers things are done in obedience to Him and His ways - and they are not. Should all evangelicals suddenly bow to the lordship of Christ evangelicalism would cease to be.

T H E S I S # 43

As God ministers to others through feeble christians, He likewise ministers through feeble churches. Multitudes benefit from attending an evangelical church. Evangelical churches compare well with non-evangelical churches.

Compared to the angels and compared to what we will soon be, yes, we are feeble. And yet the "head of the church" uses us. Who else does He have?

The angels are sane, the saints up there are sane, and we hover somewhere between sane and…. uh…. unstable. We are half-baked, partially finished, incomplete, and out of square. We are fractured, splintered, unglued, and unbalanced. And yet….

And yet our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted His great commission to us as surely as the eleven. Yes, even though….

Even though we are sometimes grouchy, always touchy, occasionally peeved, and often impatient. We are driven by restlessness, fearful of running out of stuff, and, like Martha, "worried and troubled about many things". We are self-concerned, self-directed, self-enriching, and self-confident. And yet….

And yet the life of "the Lord of the harvest" flows through us, causing us to bear fruit. Yes, even

though….

Even though unbelief outweighs belief, integrity occasionally falters, discouragement finds openings, and learning comes slow. We are sometimes sincere and sometimes not, sometimes reverential and sometimes not, sometimes pleasant and sometimes not. Talking is an addiction, listening is agony, critiquing is fun, and an audience is our joy. And yet….

And yet 'Christ and I' are a powerhouse. His power and our submission will get the job done. Yes, even though….

Even though we are slow to share, quick to judge, sluggish with encouragement, and eager to suggest. We binge on knowledge, lack understanding, dodge wisdom, and have need of discernment. We plan more for retirement than the judgment seat of Christ, we diligently lay up "treasures on earth" while slack in bettering our relationship with the One who matters most. And yet….

And yet the Lord Jesus sees fit to include us in the harvesting of souls, and in the reformation of His church. His love for us is equal to our love for Him times a thousand. Yes, even though….

Even though we are perplexed and wounded and confused and insecure. We make mistakes, repeat those mistakes, and repeat them again. We take comfort in our righteousness, remember our generous moments, and forgive ourselves quicker than others. And yet….

And yet "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us", we are "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth". Yes, even though….

Even though we compete, impress, presume and politicize. We major on minors, understate the critical, venerate our opinions, and jealously guard our reputation. And yet….

And yet we bear fruit. Perhaps not much, but some. Some is much better than none.

In spite of ourselves, we have cause to be encouraged. We are not much different than the twelve, and the twelve accomplished much through (and only through) Jesus Christ.

The twelve were sometimes impatient with those who pressed upon the Master, even little children. They found it difficult to unravel the Lord's parables. They craved an earthly kingdom. More than once they argued about who among them is greatest. They couldn't understand *The Teacher* when He spoke in simple terms about His death and resurrection. They were indignant when a woman poured "very costly fragrant oil" on Christ's head. They were often fearful and unbelieving and bickering. They abandoned their Christ at His darkest hour. Fearful and distraught, they dismissed reports of His foretold resurrection.

The angels were sane, the saints in paradise awaiting their Savior were sane, but the twelve hovered somewhere between sane and…. uh…. unstable.

The Lord Jesus Christ would have us relax in our inadequacy. This is not being frivolous, but trusting. We do not strive to be good but connected. When we finally admit we can't and lay down our effort, Lord Jesus will take over. He alone can take us from where we are to where we want to be. (It's a slo-o-o-w pace.)

Many of Christ's unfinished re-creations gather together every sunday under an evangelical tent. Usually something good happens.

A monkey was placed in a cage and wired in such a way that scientists could measure the monkey's anxiety level. Then they did mean things to aggravate the poor thing, and sure enough the anxiety level climbed dramatically. Next, they placed another monkey in the cage, and repeated the experiment on monkey number one. The anxiety level was not nearly as acute.

Those monkeys teach us there is strength in togetherness. After a funeral the grieving people gather for lunch and find respite in the chatter and fellowship. There is comfort in fellowship; God made us that way.

God gave Eve to Adam, Aaron to Moses, Ruth to Naomi, Barnabas to Paul, and John to Mary. He sent the apostles two by two. He likewise sent the seventy in pairs. He sent two to make preparations for the Passover meal, and two to fetch the colt for His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem.

There is strength in two and more strength in dozens. The gathering of christians is more potent than the gathering of non-christians because….

Matthew 18:20: *Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*

At many evangelical services Lord Jesus comes with grace to teach and grace to comfort and grace to strengthen. Heaven opens (sometimes a little and sometimes a lot) and a blessing (sometimes a little and sometimes a lot) is poured upon those in attendance. Sometimes the service is ho hum, and other times pretty good. One might have to attend a couple of ho hums to get a pretty good, but even in the ho hums there is something.

For all its inadequacy, the typical evangelical congregation bears good fruit, and through them heaven's population increases. Most churches have a children's program whereby youngsters are introduced to the Lord Jesus. And a youth program to challenge secularism for the hearts of teens.

The sincere evangelical regularly attending sunday service will be safe. Gathering with the saints will assure the branch is always connected to "the true vine". Perhaps one day he will mature sufficiently and have no need of such a formal way of gathering with the saints. But until then….

T H E S I S # 44

Within evangelical churches are some who maintain a healthy enthusiasm for Christ.

Some within evangelicalism are proof it is possible to attend an evangelical church and "maintain a healthy enthusiasm for Christ". Possible, but not probable? The casualty rate is high.

It's hard to resist the current of the majority, to stand firm while most lie prostrate before established religion, to resist the relentless pull to compromise.

Compromise. Compromise offers an immediate return but regret is just around the bend. Here-and-now rewards will be dwarfed by there-and-later loss of rewards. Compromise compromises the attachment between Vine and branch and therefore robs us of power. Less power is less answered prayers and less every good thing.

A compromiser is a 12 volt battery producing 6 volts. A compromiser runs hard but doesn't get there. The compromiser shoots and misses. The compromiser rows with one oar. Compromising is as dumb as the guy taking a trip on a go-cart, raking leaves with a hoe, playing solitaire with missing cards, telling the boss it's time for a deduction in pay.

Compromise assures loss at the judgment seat of Christ.

And yet it's possible to attend an evangelical church without compromising. There can be good and gain for the one attending but not attached.

Advice: if attending, attend with caution. Listed are eleven 'cannot-s' for the attendee determined to steer away from debilitating compromise while attending an evangelical church….

Cannot # one: *Cannot put unity above obedience.*

The builders insist on unity because a united congregation is easier to inspire and direct. Being in agreement with *the way it is* brings the reward of inclusion, but at the cost of the lordship of your Christ. Your chief responsibility is maintaining "the unity of the Spirit", an impossibility for the one agreeing to a manufactured unity.

You need not be in agreement with your neighbor to "love your neighbour as yourself", to be sensitive, to be gracious. The most tyrannical religions are the most fused; agreement is not a sign of spiritual wellness.

Cannot # two: *Cannot surrender the governance of the Holy Spirit.*

Obeying the prompting of the Holy Spirit is actually obeying the Lord Jesus; He directs your life by way of His Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." You know you are free in Christ when you do not feel obligated to ask another permission.

If leadership manages to transfer your loyalty from Christ to itself, they have done you (and the people you affect) a horrible injustice. And a negative impact on you is a negative impact on His great commission.

Cannot # three: *Cannot be an evangelical.*

From the Lord's perspective, you are only what He made you to be. If you consider yourself to be anything other than what the Bible declares, you have some renouncing to do. Lord Jesus has *never* made a man, woman, or child an evangelical.

As previously stated, it is not necessary to be an evangelical to attend an evangelical church. You are already "the light of the world", and remaining loyal to the Bible's perspective will also make you "the light of the" wayward church.

Cannot # four: *Cannot be critical of people.*

It's tempting to be judgmental (in the sense of superiority) of those inferior in wisdom and faithfulness to Lord Jesus. But it's simply not allowed….

Luke 6:37 (NLT): *"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will come back against you."*

However, there is nothing in these words of Christ forbidding the judging and condemning of religious systems and traditions contrary to your God; Christ Himself often challenged the accepted. On the contrary, there is something wrong with the christian lacking indignation while witnessing stark injustices of *the way it is*.

Cannot # five: *Cannot lean on the church for support.*

The world leans on the world, but the church is not to lean on the church.

Christ is trustworthy, we are not. When we bunch together we become *less*, not more trustworthy because of our tendency to politicize and compete. However, it's wisdom to be alert to the Holy Spirit speaking His truths and directions through church people (or whoever). A good prayer: "Lord Jesus, increase my discernment."

The endorsement of Jesus Christ, His Father, and the Holy Spirit must be your sufficiency. Seeking outside endorsement is evidence of not abiding in the reality of God's approval.

Cannot # six: *Cannot call the pastor "Pastor".*

As surely as it is offensive to the Lord to call a man *Father* ("Do not call anyone on earth your Father") or *Teacher* ("Do not be called teachers"), it must be equally repugnant to hear His sheep call a man *Pastor*. (*Pastor* means *shepherd*.) Have we forgotten, "the *Lord* is my shepherd"?

Of course, to be the only one not calling 'Pastor' Fred *Pastor Fred* will mark you. Your commitment to Christ may be obvious to all, but that matters little; you must bow to the accepted regardless of whether the accepted is based on the Bible. You *will* pay for this lack of submission to *the way it is* and your threat to unity.

2 Timothy 3:12: *Yes, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

You should not be concerned about suffering persecution; you should be concerned about *not* suffering persecution.

Cannot # seven: *Cannot depend on the local church for bulk of teaching.*

God prefers teaching through many, not one or a few. Limiting your sources is limiting God. Limiting God is limiting your potential and accomplishments. Listen for the voice of *The Teacher* teaching through whoever, be they family or friends or television/internet people, or writers, or pulpit people. "Let every man be swift to hear."

Perhaps the purest teachings will come directly from the Holy Spirit as you meditate upon the sayings of Christ at the feet of Christ.

Cannot # eight: *Cannot become a church member.*

Never sign a pledge or a membership card. The only thing a christian should sign is the last page of the Bible, symbolizing a determination to obey. A good litmus test when discerning the right and wrong of a matter is to try to imagine Paul or Peter or John agreeing to it (if they were here). Can you imagine these apostles becoming members of a local church?

Cannot # nine: *Cannot tithe*.

Why would anyone want to give ten percent of his/her income for others to invest? How can the Holy Spirit direct your life if He has no lordship over your income - which took a considerable amount of your life to earn?

More and more believers are seeing the obvious fallacy of tithing. The hardest to convince are those salaried by the tithe.

Cannot # ten: *Cannot be muzzled.*

While you are not there to disrupt, sometimes a conflict is unavoidable. Only compromisers can avoid every confrontation.

If a tither asks if you believe in tithing you must simply reply *no* (if your answer is no), and, if asked, state plainly your conviction. Should the tither suddenly stop being a tither, guess who is going to immediately notice? And guess who will be blamed?

Your presence is an endorsement of the evangelical way unless you express otherwise. Remember, you are an ambassador of Christ, not your church. May the Lord Jesus give you wisdom to know when to be discreet and when to be expressive.

Some churches will tolerate a maverick, but many will not. Again, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

Cannot # eleven: *Cannot forget your goal.*

This is the most important cannot. Your goal, of course, is more of Christ, to know Him, to pursue Him energetically. You don't want to 'change the subject' from Christ to one of many distractions.

You are privileged to be invited deeper into the person of Jesus Christ. This *Great Invitation* is the believer's precious possession. As the reasonable person would never trade gold for trinkets, likewise the reasonable believer will never ignore this divine invitation while accepting an inferior invitation to band with men.

T H E S I S # 45

Many evangelical churches have a powerful time of praise and worship during the church service whereby the Lord Jesus manifests His sweet, sweet presence.

There's pretty good preaching in many of the songs we sing. The gospel of salvation is well packaged in "Amazing Grace" and many other old and current songs.

"Just As I Am", written by an invalid, Charlotte Elliot of England (1789-1871), has been sung with heartfelt praise in millions of evangelical churches throughout much of the world. Billy Graham crusades has used "Just As I Am" to help draw millions to a decision for Jesus Christ; immediately after Billy preached, Charlotte preached. Ponder afresh the spiritual wealth and wisdom in what could possibly be the most sung hymn in evangelicalism….

Just As I Am

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

This sermon-song not only summons the seeker to come as is, but also rouses us, who have already come, into deeper depths of Christ. None sufficiently hungry are disqualified from obtaining more of Him. May our daily prayer be, "O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

Everyone has heard of the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. Both were mid-18th century preachers, John the more prolific and famous. John was one of the first to take the gospel message outside anglican church walls into the fields, the marketplaces, and roadsides of England - this being far beyond the boundaries of accepted protocol. It must have taken real grit to oppose *the way it is* back then because the controlling lords were much sterner than those today. John's influence spread throughout the United Kingdom, the young american colonies, and elsewhere.

However, of the two brothers, Charles, the hymnist, has preached to far more evangelicals (etcetera). Most of us have never read a John Wesley sermon, but almost all have heard inspiring, quality teachings through the sermon-songs of Charles. One of his most memorable creations is his easter canticle, masterfully blending sound teaching with praise and hope and encouragement….

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!

Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!

Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!

Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!

Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!

Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!

Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!

Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!

Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!

Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!

Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!

Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!

Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia!

Praise to thee by both be given, Alleluia!

Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!

Hail the Resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

King of glory, soul of bliss, Alleluia!

Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!

Thee to know, Thy power to prove, Alleluia!

Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!

How could a woman, blind since infancy, hope to be of much use to the Lord Jesus? Fannie Crosby (1820-1915) has written about eight thousand hymns and lyrics, many making their way into hymnals, thus blessing several generations of mainline protestants and evangelicals. Ponder the words of this sermon-song written in 1873….

Blessed Assurance

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!

Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Refrain:

This is my story, this is my song,

Praising my Savior all the day long;

This is my story, this is my song,

Praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,

Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;

Angels, descending, bring from above

Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,

I in my Savior am happy and blest,

Watching and waiting, looking above,

Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

It is good to sing, both by oneself and in harmony with others. Singing truth is declaring truth; declaring truth gets truth deeper into our hearts. Truth ignored is powerless to sanctify; embraced, it causes great gain.

Music is one of God's methods of drawing His children into intimacy. What we will become depends on the quality of today's spiritual diet. Hearing is good, speaking and declaring is better. Prayer life

should include singing.

The value of corporate praise and worship will vary from one congregation to the next. As appreciation for "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" is more profound in one believer than another, so the depth of collective gratitude varies from church to church. But all is good.

Singing truth is medicinal, and softens the heart. (That's why collection immediately follows praise and worship.) We elevate each other as we sing together. We get a respite from burdens as we lose ourselves in praise and worship. Jesus strengthens us. Singing of our bright tomorrow in that land that defies description, we are less affected by our troublesome now. The least happy (the least rewarded) up there is considerably more blessed than the happiest here.

The Lord Jesus Christ is magnified in most songs. It is so appropriate and fulfilling to give due homage to "the King of kings and Lord of lords". Some who sing His name haven't mentioned Him since last sunday, and if not for praise time during sunday service, would rarely mention Him.

Quite often the focus is changed from Jesus to something else when the pulpit person begins his forty minute sermon. It's amazing how a christian can avoid Christ while talking to a church full of christians, but such is common. If he would elevate "the name which is above every name" the entire congregation would be healthier and thus more fruitful.

It is quite possible the twenty minutes of praise more effectively draws people into the church than the forty minutes of pulpit ministry. It is also quite possible attendance would increase if the twenty minutes became forty, and the forty twenty.

The tail end of the history of church worship is even better than the early years. The inflation of christian artists in the last few decades has translated into a real smorgasbord of choice. And with the arrival of audio tapes and cd's and internet, every christian has brought quality sermon-songs home. Many of us have hundreds of songs available at a click or two.

Huge stadiums throughout the nations are filled with worshippers who come to participate with their favorite worship band or quartet or soloist. There is a 24/7 house of prayer in Kansas City, Missouri

whereby praise has never ceased for several years. But most offerings of praise unto our most high Christ is in the local church, evangelical and others.

T H E S I S # 46

Many quality spiritual insights proceed from evangelical pulpits every sunday.

Luke 24:32 (NLT): *They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road, and explained the Scriptures to us?"*

When Lord Jesus speaks "our hearts burn within us". Sometimes it is Him speaking through the pulpit person sunday morning. And sometimes not.

It would be relaxing if we could accept as true what every pulpit fellow declared. But we cannot. While some messages are high quality, others must be categorized as false teachings. To further complicate matters, false teachings contain some truth, and commendable teachings could include faulty perspectives.

1 Corinthians 14:29 (NLT): *Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said.*

Evaluate. Judge. Examine. Check. Appraise.

A mature christian is a practiced evaluator. He learned a long time ago bad guys can say good things and good guys can say bad things. The naïve shout "Amen!" carelessly. We need to guard our hearts so impurities do not gain access. A false teaching, once rooted, is hard to extract.

One sunday the preacher gives an inspiring and accurate message, and we could assume the guy can be trusted. But not necessarily so. He could be like the friend we all have who switches from wise to dumb in a heartbeat. Or he could be like Peter….

Our Lord commended Peter when he declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." A few minutes later our Lord slammed Peter when he rebuked Jesus after Jesus spoke of His coming suffering in Jerusalem.

In us all is wise, and in us all is dumb. We got some things right and other things wrong. The humble acknowledges his inadequacy.

Lord Jesus speaks to His defective church through His defective church. His preference is to speak through all to all, but *the way it is* forbids it. Nonetheless He speaks through the system's chosen to the degree he is open. Our place is to….

Evaluate. Judge. Examine. Check. Appraise.

T H E S I S # 47

When one considers church leadership one should think of Jesus Christ and not any man or group of men.

Matthew 23:10 (NASB): *Do not be called leaders; for One is your leader, that is, Christ.*

Matthew 23:10 (TAB): *You must not be called masters (leaders), for you have one Master (Leader), the Christ.*

If we are not to *call* a man leader we, obviously, should not *consider* a man leader - not our leader nor the leader of the church.

If we are not to consider a man leader, we should not consider *men* leaders. This would include pastoral executives, board of elders, denominational bosses, all 'reverends', all salaried, everyone. Because….

Matthew 23:8 (NLT): *All of you are equal as brothers and sisters.*

In Christ's church there are only brothers and sisters in Christ. No fathers, no sons, no mothers, no daughters. All are of the same rank. Equal.

An elder is not a brother of higher rank, but either an older brother or one more knowledgeable and faithful than most.

Our pastor is Jesus, our teacher is Jesus, our leader is Jesus, our elder brother is Jesus.

The New Testament uses the words *leader* and *leaders* several times in the New Testament, but seldom in reference to the church. At the least, that is interesting, but more, it is corrective for those using those words loosely, in a manner that refers to man or men as church leadership.

There is, however, a problem for some….

Hebrews 13:7 (NIV): *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.*

Though the KJV and the NKJV never use the word *leader* (in reference to the church), other translations do. The NIV's Hebrews 13:7 cites an occasion when the Bible seems to conflict with itself: "One is your leader" verses "your leaders". Or: one Leader (Christ) verses several leaders (christians). You should give this matter serious consideration, for many use what seems to be a discrepancy to draw others away from the lordship of Jesus unto the lordship of themselves.

A christian is both spiritual and carnal. The spiritual is supposed to gain continual ascendency over the carnal but, sadly, that is often not so. In the Bible the Holy Spirit speaks to both the spiritual christian (those more spiritual than carnal) and the carnal christian (those more carnal than spiritual).

As a pastor is, in reality, an *under*-pastor (a pastor under Christ, someone who Christ pastors through), and as an evangelist is one used by *The Great Evangelist* (you and I were evangelized by none other than the Holy Spirit who evangelizes through whoever), so a leader ("remember your leaders") is a leader only in a very limited sense. His/her main function is to point you to the one, true Leader.

What does "Lord" mean, if not *Leader*? And what does "head of the church" mean if not *Leader*? Do we have several lords? Several "heads"? Several leaders?

That there are two truths, one spiritual and one natural, shouldn't confuse.

John 16:32: *You will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*

Truth: Jesus was left alone. Truth: Jesus was never alone.

Truth: When you are alone you are alone. Truth: When you are alone you are not alone. ("I will never leave you.")

Truth: There are several leaders in the church. Truth: There is one Leader in the church.

One truth is topped by a higher truth. One truth applies to the carnal christian, the other applies to the spiritual. The reason most evangelicals reference a man or men when speaking of church leadership is simply because most evangelicals are carnal (more carnal than spiritual). Blame that on *the way it is*.

As it is wrong to call a man *leader* ("Do not be called leaders"), it is likewise wrong to call a man *father* ("Do not call anyone on earth your father"). It used to be catholics and some mainline protestants were the only ones guilty of disobeying Christ's mandate, but lately it has been trendy in some evangelical corners to call others *father*. It seems like permission to call another father (or refer to a brother in Christ as his/her spiritual father) is found in Paul's letter to Timothy….

1 Timothy 1:2: *To timothy,* my true son *in the faith.*

And to Titus….

Titus 1:4: *To Titus,* a true son *in our common faith.*

And to the Corinthians….

1 Corinthians 4:15: *Though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have* many fathers*; for in Christ Jesus* I have begotten you *through the gospel.*

Now let's compare these verses to….

Ephesians 1:5: *having predestined us to* adoption as sons *by Jesus Christ* to Himself.

Luke 11:2: Our Father in heaven*, hallowed be Your name.*

Romans 1:7: *Grace to you and peace from* God our Father*.*

There are two truths, equally true but not equally relevant and not equally valuable and not equally emphasized. One truth applies to the carnal believer, the other to the spiritual. The one living in carnal reality can be compared to the christian who lives in a dingy basement suite, and the one living in spiritual reality is the one living upstairs on the main floor.

Timothy's true Father is Paul's true Father. Paul's true Father is our true Father. Our true Father is Christ's true Father. That is the reality we should abide in. We all were led to Christ by someone, and yet we should not consider that someone to be our spiritual father (or mother). Our hearts and minds should be trained to see beyond flesh and blood, to see *The Great Evangelist* who brought us to our spiritual Father by bringing us to Jesus.

Nothing in the Bible nullifies Christ's command: "Do not call anyone on earth your father."

T H E S I S # 48

The pastor, not Christ, is the actual leader and shepherd and teacher of the evangelical

congregation.

Many evangelicals, after serious and honest and perhaps painful examination of motives and intentions, could confess: *The actual leader and shepherd and teacher of me is me.* Or: *The actual leader and shepherd and teacher of me is Pastor Whoever.*

Evangelicals either shepherd themselves by their own understanding or surrender themselves to the shepherding of another – while assuming or pretending "The Lord is my Shepherd".

Only the one sensitive and submissive to the Holy Spirit can truthfully say, "The Lord is my Shepherd" simply because Lord Jesus shepherds us via the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is not the One who shepherds us He soon can be. Sincere repentance will bring the drifter back to "first love", back to where she once was, back to "that great Shepherd of the sheep".

The pastor, not Jesus, shepherds (or attempts to shepherd) the congregation. *The way it is* implies the Lord desires to shepherd His sheep through this endorsed man. This inference is no different than that of catholicism and many etceteras. However, it is not the Lord's way to shepherd through one, but through many and through each other.

Man's endorsement shouldn't impress us; God's endorsement should.

Lord Jesus ministers through the humble and the available, those who have not disqualified themselves. The pastor is a man who is shepherded by lords loftier than himself, a man who de-emphasizes the shepherding of Christ. He can teach *about* Jesus, but cannot teach Jesus. He is unable to lead the congregation into an intimacy he hasn't fostered.

Our Lord only shepherds through those who He shepherds. The pastor's submission to evangelical lords and the sparse fruit of his congregation are sufficient evidence the man is not in submission to "that great Shepherd". And this should not surprise us….

Does the businessman invite the Lord Jesus to take charge of his business? Does the student commit his schooling to the lordship of Christ? Did the young lady ask the Lord Jesus to choose her marriage partner? Has Dad and Mom surrendered parenting to Jesus? Is the plumber a plumber

because that is the profession chosen for him by "the head of the church"?

Quite rare is the evangelical who spends his days under the governance of the most Holy Spirit. And the pastor is, more than most, an evangelical. He serves evangelicalism, he preaches evangelicalism, he is financially supported by evangelicalism, he is thoroughly loyal to the ways and means of evangelicalism.

There is a better way for you. The Lord Jesus wants to shepherd you. Personally. A branch abiding in the vine. A sheep following his Shepherd. A Mary sitting at the feet of *The Teacher*. A disciple sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. A son/daughter cognizant of a doting Father.

To get from where we are to where we want to be requires honesty and humility and courage. Said another way, we will never attain 'better' without honesty and humility and courage. Said another way, without honesty and humility and courage we are stuck where we're at. However….

However honesty and humility and courage can thoroughly upset our *'the way it is'*. Not only will we be warring against the familiar and accepted but against protectors of the familiar and accepted. ("I have not come to bring peace but a sword.") If peace and getting along are your primary concern it would be a mistake to venture into better.

Martin Luther dared to challenge the accepted, and Martin Luther faced the wrath of the protectors. Evangelicalism would never have become the entrenched power it now is if there were some who had his courage of conviction, some willing to "suffer for righteousness sake", a few standing against encroaching "wind of doctrine", "trickery of men", "cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting". Because of their dearth of honesty and humility and courage certain evangelical traditions are above par with the Bible. And because of our dearth of honesty and humility and courage those harmful traditions continue to steer His people astray.

James 5:16 (NIV): *Confess your sins to each other.*

A well known preacher who accomplished more than hundreds of us combined once said publicly, "I have a tendency to be a phony." Most of us do but few realize it, fewer admit it, and fewer yet

would say so publicly. This was an honest man, a humble man, a man of courage.

Honesty will cause us to identify our "actual leader and shepherd and teacher". Humility will bring us to repent and take ownership of our betrayal. And courage is needed to turn away from inferior shepherds and return to "that great Shepherd of the sheep".

To attain a higher plain we must be shepherded by Jesus Christ. None other is qualified to bring us from here to there. That's why He alone is worthy of the title "Pastor".

T H E S I S # 49

Three dissimilarities place the pastor above the rest – his license, titles and salary; none of the three have Bible precedent.

To understand how certification can be so valued within evangelicalism one must fully accept Bible precedent is of little importance to evangelical lords. Until then, nothing makes sense. And over centuries of church history, for the same reason, there has always been scarce need for Bible precedent to justify titles and salaries.

That the twelve were not licensed, that the seventy were not licensed, that no New Testament person was licensed or titled or salaried means between little and nothing within the evangelical way. The only explanation seems to be that evangelicalism must be considered a *progression* of the Bible, an *improvement* over that which the earliest (and successful) pioneers were familiar. However….

However a Bible 'progressed', a Bible 'improved', is not the Bible. It is sand. Jesus warned the house built on sand will surely fall. ("And great was its fall.")

The pastor of the congregation is simply not building (much of) his life and (much of) his ministry upon the rock of Christ's sayings. That's why both life and ministry is sparse of fruit.

It's difficult for the evangelical to comprehend that *the way it is*, with its impressive numbers, the way it has been for centuries, could be so wrong. But the alternative is harder yet to accept - that the Bible could be wrong. For example….

What does the New Testament have to say about licenses and certificates?

Nothing.

The word 'license', as you know, cannot be found in the Bible. However, evangelicalism is so overwhelming to the evangelical, *it simply doesn't matter what the Bible says or does not say*.

An open letter to adherents of the Kelowna Evangelical Ministerial:

Paul taught the Corinthians, "Let two or three…. speak and let the others judge (NKJV)." Please give my proposal prayerful consideration. Thank you.

Whereas there is a division within Christ's church whereby members are segregated into either the clergy (or ministerial) and laity (laymen, laywomen); and

Whereas such division has no New Testament precedent; and

Whereas this practice is contrary to the words of the Lord Jesus, "All of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters (NLT)" and

Whereas your denominational/associational licenses and ordination certificates are strong symbols propagating such division, I offer the following recommendations:

In the near future, after ample discussion and debate, agree to meet as a group in a public place (such as Kelowna City Park or Prospera Place) for the purpose of publicly disposing all such certificates, this preceded by a public announcement of your intention especially directed to those under your influence.

Consider disposing your certificates by casting them in a fire visible to all, or inserting them in a shredder, or simply tearing them before the audience and, more important, before the Lord Jesus.

And further, select one to vocalize sincere repentance unto the Lord Jesus, expressing the group's regret for its part in the rendering of the church into two segments.

Please do not be slighted by this proposal, unusual but, from Biblical perspective, reasonable. Instead consider….

Consider: The red words in the Bible give no hint His twelve were to be so endorsed.

Consider: Saul was certified (Acts 9), Paul was anointed.

Consider: Christ appealed to His works for endorsement, not a certificate.

Consider: Differences of conclusions, within your ranks, of various texts nullifies the argument that the practice of licensing protects the purity of the Word.

Faith moves God. Brothers, accepting this proposal could release the power of God in our city. Contemporaries elsewhere would know immediately of your brave deed, and some would follow your example.

Respectfully,

Larry Jones

If it was God's intention for christians to confer titles upon christians there would be evidence found in New Testament writings. Perhaps Paul would be *Reverend Paul*, Peter would be *Reverend Peter*, and John would be *Reverend John*. But no, Paul was *Paul*, Peter was *Peter*, and John was *John*. Seems it worked just fine.

Some suggest titles honor the man's *gifting* or *position*, not the man himself.

Oh?

Reverend (Webster's): *Used as a title of respect applied or prefixed to the name of a member of the clergy or a religious order. Worthy to be revered; entitled to reverence.*

This definition doesn't suggest the *function* is "worthy to be revered", but rather the *man* engaged in that function is "entitled to reverence".

So the evangelical way would have a brother reverence a fellow brother, not because he is made holy by the blood of the Lamb, but rather because he has attained certification by his own effort.

Matthew 18:3 (NLT): *I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins, and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Typically, a reverend, like most of us, starts his christianity with a big heart ("like little children") and small head ("like little children"). And, like most of us, time shrinks his heart while swelling his head.

He lives and ministers from his mind more than his heart. That's why his eyes and sermons are dry. He affects the minds of his audience much but their hearts little, hearts that desperately need a real, live, caring, doting Jesus.

Many reverends are attracted to the position of pastor because of the salary. The Bible has much to say about supporting the one who busies himself ministering the word - the twelve, and Jesus Himself, were supported by "many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him" – but such support has no resemblance to a salary.

A salaried minister is an employee. He doesn't like that description of himself, preferring the softer, more religious term *supported*, but he does fit the definition of *employee*. An employee has an *employer* (or employers); the salaried minister has many employers. (And he doesn't like that word either.) Employers need to be catered to, heard, satisfied. As "you cannot serve God and mammon", one cannot serve God and christians.

A salaried reverend is often a partially burned-out reverend. God hasn't equipped him to do all he does. The workload, coupled with a list of complications as long as the list of members, is too burdensome for most.

The apostles were supported (not salaried) *while doing* the work of ministry. They did not have a contract with anyone, written or unwritten. Their Lord was Jesus alone - who directed them individually through the Holy Spirit. That's the way it's supposed to work, those doing ministry (effectively) – licensed or unlicensed, titled or untitled – supported by concerned others.

T H E S I S # 50

The pastor is the connecting door between two spiritual spheres, the denomination that licensed him and the congregation he serves. It was the man's loyalty to his denomination that secured his post as pastor.

(See note.) 'Pastor' John is a man of divided loyalties. He is a product of both the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, which he has studied more than most, and the denomination that schooled, trained and certified him.

It was his proven willingness to cooperate that procured him the position of pastor of Bread of Life Assembly, and he is determined to prove himself faithful to those above him. There is much pressure on John to conform to *That's Just The Way It Is!*, and to lead others into conformity. Like the plumber and the doctor in the congregation, he needs that paycheck to feed his wife and kids. And like the plumber and doctor he has no desire to change his occupation.

John has his eye on a larger congregation. The bigger the church, the better the pay and benefits. He wants to be a good provider for his growing family, and there's retirement to think about. But the competition is heavy; he must prove himself responsible to those higher in rank or his chances of advancement will decrease.

'Pastor' John is a connecting door between two spiritual spheres, one being the denomination that endorsed him, the other the assembly he serves. Whereas the 'laity' lives in one world, John lives in two. From the one he is sent, to the other he has arrived. The one has trained him, the other is his ministry. The one has his loyalty, the other his energy. He listens to one, he speaks to the other. His peers and friends live in one sphere, his followers in the other. The perspective he receives from one he passes on to the other.

John's 'ministerial' realm is exclusive to fellow 'ministers' and the people John serves. Most in the 'laity' do not know how the denomination operates -- its bylaws and governing process. People will never meet those who make decisions that, through 'Pastor' John, affect their lives. There is a wide gap between the two spiritual worlds, bridged only by 'Pastor' John.

'Pastor' John is five feet, eight inches tall (about average). If, spiritually speaking, he were five foot eight, he would be much taller, about six foot six, in the sight of the congregation. And growing.

Every time he ministers behind the pulpit, he increases in their sight. He becomes wiser, more discerning, more anointed, more favored. Bigger, increasingly bigger. Such is the power of the pulpit. To the wife he is bigger than husband; to the children dad and mom are comparatively spiritual

midgets.

On Sunday morning 'Pastor' John steps to the pulpit. This is his hour. He is meticulously attired in his suit-and-tie uniform, hair recently trimmed, shoes polished. He has been trained for this hour, he has had much practice, he has prayed, he is ready to go.

John breaks his sermon into three easy-to-remember points. He raises and lowers his voice and inserts a few jokes to keep monotony from setting in. He is an impressive, authoritative figure. He is practiced, poised, professional. Preaching over, he has grown in stature in the sight of his listeners.

And the people have imperceptibly shrunk in their own valuation. As John becomes bigger, they become smaller -- less wise, less anointed, less valued. And more subservient to this man who obviously has a special position in God.

John does not often preach "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He speaks of principles and keys and responsibilities and works and being good enough. But rarely Jesus.

John has taken various courses in psychology that will help obtain promotions within the sphere of *the way it is* which provides his livelihood. Since there is a mixture in John's heart, there is a mixture in his message. And since there is a blend in his preaching/teaching, there is a mixture in the hearts of the assembly. The Jesus he presents to Bread of Life is not New Testament Jesus, not the miracle-working Jesus, not Christ the Healer. Whereas Paul's preaching was not "with persuasive words" or "excellence of speech", but "in demonstration of the Spirit and in power", John's preaching is void of power but dependent on "excellence of speech".

The preaching is different because the men are different because their relationship with Christ is different. Paul was a bondservant of Christ; John is a man of divided loyalties, trying to serve both Christ and *the way it is*.

John is not less spiritual than most, perhaps even more so. He didn't create *the way it is*; he is, in part, its product. He is a victim of victims. He is in bondage to those in bondage. When he stands before Christ at the judgment seat he will have an assortment of "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay,

and straw", just like the rest of us.

I know of some who sit in the office of pastor who have a passion for Christ that is far above my own. But the point is this: 'Pastor' Whoever should not be idolized. Pastor-worship is sin. Though *the way it is* has made him to appear to be something he is not, the Word teaches that he is simply a brother, spiritually taller than some, shorter than others. He is not "Reverend". He is not your pastor.

If this book were addressed to christian catholics, I would tell them that they must refute man-worship -- the priest, bishop, cardinal, pope. I would tell them that there is a reverence that is good in God's sight, a reverence for each other on the basis of who we are in Christ. And I would tell them that there is a reverence that is unsanctified, one that lifts one brother above another, based on position established by *the way it is*.

I would tell them that we are all priests unto God, and that God did not appoint someone to make sacrifices on their behalf. There is one High Priest, and under Him we are all equal in His sight. There is no 'clergy'; there is no 'laity'. And you, looking from the outside, can see clearly that such homage to man is sin. How much easier it is to see the flaws of other faiths.

Do not make the same mistake. Your Bible teaches that partiality is sin. Allegiance to non-Biblical traditions is disloyalty to Jesus Christ. Do not let your heart be a mixture, a blending of *the way it is* and the Word of God. Commit yourself to the Bible, God's lone authoritative Word, and to the lordship of the "Spirit of truth".

Note: This is an excerpt from *The Way It Is…. Confronting Evangelical Traditions* (available at larryjones.ca).

T H E S I S # 51

The pastor is expected, by his church and his denomination, to capture the congregation's

loyalty. He is usually successful.

John 16:13: *When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.*

The pastor and the Holy Spirit compete for your trust and loyalty. The winner will be the one you accept as guide throughout your christianity.

As the denomination is represented by the pastor, the Lord Jesus is represented by the Holy Spirit. Yes, 'behind' the pastor are denominational lords, and 'behind' the Holy Spirit is none other than our most precious Christ.

The pastor did not choose to be the pastor – though he did apply for the posting - but rather he was chosen by the denomination only after denominational lords were satisfied the man's loyalty was firmly fixed on them.

As loyalty to denominational lords can be measured by loyalty to their teachings as conveyed by the pastor, loyalty to Christ Jesus can be likewise measured by loyalty to *His* teachings as conveyed by Scripture. We identify the one who has won our trust by the words we obey.

Evangelicals obey two lords, neither fully.

Evangelicals obey many non-Biblical traditions. And evangelicals obey many Biblical teachings. We are talking an unholy mixture - somewhat obedient to Christ, somewhat not.

The pastor has successfully led the congregation away from dependence on "the Spirit of truth", this being evidenced by their speech. Nobody calls the Holy Spirit *Pastor Holy Spirit*, but they do call the man *Pastor Whoever*. If language means anything this is sufficient evidence the man, not the Holy Spirit, is the considered leader.

Identifying lordship should be fully settled by the christian's own words. Shouldn't one assume they call the man *Pastor* because he is? And shouldn't one assume they do not call the Holy Spirit *Pastor* (or refer to Him as such) because He isn't?

Not only is the pastor pressured by upper lords to stay within *the way it is*, but also by converted church membership. They too have become security guards against reformational intrusion.

There is security in numbers. So many *can't* be wrong even when they're wrong. The mainline protestant church down the road that believes opposite on most issues can't be wrong either, simply because they are tethered to the same logic: So many can't be wrong.

But church history has taught us so many *can* be wrong. Every generation has been plagued by ambitious lords vying for the peoples' trust and loyalty.

Jesus has sent us the only One capable of pastoring us, the most Holy Spirit. There is a *huge* difference between the christian led through life by men and the christian led through life by the Holy Spirit. That's huge as in enormous, colossal, vast. The judgment seat of Christ will reveal which christian was foolish and which one was wise.

T H E S I S # 52

Many evangelists 'turn' pastor because only the pastor is salaried. This results in less people spending their eternity with Jesus in heaven.

Of the five ministry types – apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher – it is the pastor who has been most successful in securing the pulpit, the power, and the paycheck. And this has created many negative consequences….

Often the pastor is not a pastor. He is called *Pastor*, he is recognized as the pastor, but he does not have the calling (or gifting) of pastor. Perhaps *more often than not* the pastor is not a pastor.

Those with the calling of pastor – not the *occupation* of pastor – are, mostly, pew persons. These seem to be easy going people, soft spoken, gentle, listeners - caring more about you than themselves. It is not in their genes to be an administrator (which is the chief role of the employed 'pastor', especially in a large church). You are their concern, you are their friend, and they are your prayer intercessor. These people probably have no need or heart to be the director/shepherd/teacher of the local assembly.

Many evangelists fill the post of pastor, having turned from their calling to a position more lucrative. This way they get to stay home with wife instead of travelling from city to city, and be more directly involved in the children's upbringing. The support the local evangelist should get he doesn't get because Pastor Whoever gets it. So he becomes Pastor Whoever. "This results in less people spending their eternity with Jesus in heaven."

And what is true for the evangelist is true for the apostle. And the prophet. And the teacher.

Builders also covet top position in the assembly. Without that pulpit and that power and that paycheck they have no hope of scratching their itch to build things - spiritual things and etcetera things. Weekly he uses the instrument of enthusiasm to whip the people into fulfilling his religious ambitions. Builders impress us with their accomplishments, but the price of those trophies can be a church-full of depleted evangelicals, relationally distant from the Lord Jesus.

The builders have to compete against the controllers who, like the builders, need the pulpit to gratify their addiction. And also competing are the intellectuals, those who dazzle the ordinary with their ability to express with finesse, to wield words with the agility of the circus juggler. Also competing are lovers of money; there's big money to be had for those sufficiently ambitious and greedy.

The true pastors who make it to the top are often too burdened with a hundred church matters to pastor. So they attempt to shepherd from the pulpit. Like a shoe store that carries one size of shoe, the pastor has one message for all sizes and shapes of needs and questions.

A mother has a mother's heart, a father has a father's heart, but many (most?) 'pastors' simply do not have a shepherd's heart. They are not callous, but unequipped. They may try to fake it but it ain't working.

Christianity would be in much better shape if christianity outlawed the salary.

THESIS # 53

The pastor dictates who speaks from the pulpit. Almost always he appoints himself.

Thirty reverends from throughout the city, representing various denominations and associations and whatevers, are gathered for their monthly luncheon. In their midst is one person who has correct doctrine. The rest are comparatively inferior.

They need this person's insights more than he needs theirs simply because they have yet to arrive at his lofty understanding on almost every issue. His insights should be enviable, but the others, to their detriment, do not realize his superior caliber, and therefore do not give him due deference.

Sad. Their christianity would be greatly enhanced if they would contain their own compulsion to express, and become his audience. Gladly he would pour his insights into his brothers to realign their faulty perspectives - if only they would simply trust him.

Who is this brazen one of thirty who thinks so highly of himself?

To that question all thirty would all give the same answer though all thirty would disagree with all others.

Hunh?

Their answer is.... *me*.

Proverbs 21:2 (NIV): *All a man's ways seem right to him.*

'Me' thinks: *Obviously if I had an insight less than accurate I would have already made an adjustment. But I haven't made an adjustment because, obviously, there is no such need. Therefore, obviously, my understanding on any given issue must be correct. Obviously.*

Many of us are the same, our "ways seem right to" us, even when they're not. Our security is our correctness, our reputation hinges on being right and, therefore, balk when opposing views are

expressed by those less discerning. We are not as teachable as we think.

A common possession of many of the thirty is a pulpit. From here they can inform the less informed, correct the misinformed, and set them on a truer course. Since their perspective is loftier than most, it would be folly to trust their beloved and prized pulpit to an inferior.

T H E S I S # 54

It is non-Biblical and unhealthy for one (or a few) to have excessive influence over many.

Back to the thirty reverends....

Congregations would be much healthier if the thirty reverends rotated churches every sunday so the people would have a variety of perspectives, rather than one.

The five giftings of Ephesians 4:11 - apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher - could be called *preaching* gifts because they all involve preaching (i.e., the evangelist wouldn't be very effective if he didn't preach). These preaching gifts are God's way of ministering truth to His. The Lord Jesus shepherds His sheep, partly (primarily?), by the preaching of several.

And two or three rotating pastors in a large church isn't very 'several'.

Every one of us has strengths. And every one of us has kinks. We pass on both to others, not all others but some others. The effect we have depends on our influence. In the congregation none is more influential than the pastor.

The pastor should share the pulpit so the congregation is not ill affected by his spiritual quirks. *(Quirks? Who me!?)* An angry pastor, in time, produces angry christians, an arrogant pastor results in arrogant christians, a controller begets controllers. This harmful cookie-cutter effect would be minimized by a shared pulpit. Many voices is the Lord's way.

Even better than the rotating thirty is a pulpit open to whoever is qualified - which would certainly include many pew people. But if *the way it is* allowed such a practice it would diminish its own

power. So, no way, un-unh, ain't gonna' happen. The salaried must justify his salary, the titled his titles, the credentialed his credential.

Those regularly attending an evangelical assembly can offset any negative effect of one by inserting into their lives a variety of other voices. Today there are many quality voices on the internet (etcetera) surpassing those behind most pulpits. The Holy Spirit would eagerly direct the prayerful evangelical into quality preaching that would fit her particular need.

To choose even the best of the thirty as one's shepherd is a serious mistake with ill and eternal consequences. Not one of the thirty is capable of leading a group of evangelicals into a meaningful, spiritually prosperous christianity, this evidenced by the fact they themselves have not attained a meaningful, spiritually prosperous christianity, this evidenced by their allegiance to non-Biblical ways.

Psalm 23:1: *A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd.*

Let's talk about David….

David, "son of Jesse", was considered a great man, so much so that Bethlehem was called "the city of David", "an angel of the Lord" addressed Joseph as "Joseph, son of David", "the multitudes" called Jesus "the son of David", Lord Jesus called Himself "the Root and Offspring of David". David's name is mentioned in the NT more than all other OT characters except Moses and Abraham.

So what is the secret of David's greatness?

The answer is found in the first line of what is sometimes affectionately called, *The Shepherd's Psalm*: "The Lord is my shepherd."

David declared "The Lord is my shepherd" because the Lord *was* his Shepherd. It wasn't just a cute and sugary thing to say; he meant it. David could say of his Shepherd, "He leads me" ("He leads me beside the still waters") because he allowed himself to be led.

To be shepherded by Jesus means to be shepherded by Jesus – and not by self and not by another and not by others. We are led by Jesus through our days and weeks and months and years. He is the lord of our mondays and tuesdays, our januarys and februarys, our springs and summers. Where we can be found is where He has brought us. What we are doing is what He has told us to do. Only such a one can say, "The Lord is my shepherd."

We must know thoroughly the greatness of David was an overflow of the Shepherd-sheep relationship. Most of us have read and said, "The Lord is my shepherd", but didn't mean it – not with the depth and sincerity David meant it. We assume He is though He isn't though He wants to be.

God said of David, "a man after My own heart". What a compliment! David's great deeds, beginning with the slaying of "the lion and the bear" as a shepherd-boy, were accomplished through relationship, a Pastor-sheep relationship.

David's kind of greatness will come to any person with David's kind of commitment. The NT gives us many examples: John the baptist, John the apostle, Paul, Peter, Stephen, etcetera. And ensuing church history gives thousands more.

Our greatness (or lack of greatness) will be revealed before all at the judgment seat of Christ.

T H E S I S # 55

The evangelical pastor who repents of compromise and makes a decision to obey the Bible will lose his position.

This is a volatile thesis and should stimulate a reaction – surprise, disbelief, annoyance…. *something!*

Like all theses, # 55 should be thoroughly considered and challenged. Is it really possible the appointed shepherd of an evangelical church would be released from duty by ecclesiastical lords if he made a commitment to the Bible?

And if so, what does that say about evangelicalism?

Let's use our imagination. *Pastor Whoever* of *Whatever Evangelical Assembly* has a very unusual announcement for his congregation this sunday morning….

Good morning, everyone!

A few days ago I recommitted my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I have had need to do this occasionally over the years of my christianity because my tendency has been to slowly drift from Him. However, this recommitment to the Lord was different than all others; this time I also committed myself to the Bible.

You may be surprised to know I had never previously yielded fully to the Bible. Perhaps I sensed to do so might complicate life for me and my family. I realize now it is impossible to be fully committed to Jesus Christ without being equally committed to The Word*.*

To symbolize to Lord Jesus my loyalty to the Bible, I signed the last page, right under Revelation 22:21. I vowed to our Lord I will obey His words as the most Holy Spirit enlightens me. Almost immediately the Spirit of the Lord revealed discrepancies in my life and in my ministry. It is those discrepancies I will address this morning, and the necessary changes that will affect everyone in this church.

First of all, I am requesting you no longer address me as Pastor Whoever. *Lord Jesus alone is your Shepherd, and I understand the Bible to suggest no man should be called* Pastor. *You may call me* Brother Whoever *or simply* Whoever, *but no longer* Pastor Whoever.

Also, I will no longer be on salary. The Lord showed me there is no Biblical precedent for a salary. You may support me through donations if you feel so moved. I am aware I will have to augment that support with part-time employment, and therefore you will have to carry some of the church burdens.

Romans 2:11 states, "There is no partiality with God." Since God shows no partiality to men neither should we. As of today we are all on equal ground. I do not want to be treated more special than anyone. I suggest we all financially and prayerfully support those who minister to us, weighing one's need and value of service.

And no more tithing. Frankly, I never did believe in tithing, though I often implied that I did. This was a horrible compromise on my part. I have apologized to the Lord Jesus, and this morning I apologize to this assembly. Hereafter I will exhort you to commit your giving to the Holy Spirit. You will be much more fruitful if you do.

Also, I must be obedient to Ephesians, chapter four by allowing others to share this pulpit. Together we will determine how to best identify those in this assembly able and willing to preach. Hopefully, we will all learn to exalt the name of Jesus from this pulpit, always keeping our focus on Him.

Also, major decisions regarding Whatever Evangelical Assembly *will be made corporately. When Paul wrote directions and corrections to the churches he addressed all the believers, not a chosen few. Obviously he considered everyone equally responsible. We must prayerfully seek the will of "the head of the church" on matters of concern. Only then will He be our Lord in fact, rather than symbolically.*

I will be forwarding to denominational headquarters my intention to make these changes. Hopefully they will give me their blessing.

Does anyone really think the denominational bosses will respond favorably to *Pastor Whoev*…. oops!…. make that *Brother Whoever?* Can anyone realistically imagine such a response as…. ?

Dear Brother Whoever;

We so appreciate your keen insights on New Testament writings regarding Christ's church, and your determination to lead Whatever Evangelical Assembly *into fuller obedience to Him. Rest assured you have our unwavering support in your effort to honor our Lord Jesus Christ, the only true "head of the church".*

Yours in Christ,

The Regional District Board of Directors

Perhaps a response less challenging to your imagination would be something like this….

Dear Brother Whoever;

Thank you for sending us your intentions regarding Whatever Evangelical Assembly. *We have forwarded your letter to national office, and they have assured us of their full support of our response to this crisis.*

After much discussion among board members, please be informed we have terminated your position as pastor of Whatever Evangelical Assembly *to be effective immediately, as you have violated the understanding and trust between you and us.*

Please do not take this as a retaliatory rebuke; we are simply wanting to protect the local assembly (and also the entire denomination) from your extreme views. Further, as we suspect you may be in an advanced stage of burnout, we will immediately make arrangements for admittance into our Resident Recovery Home for pastors as soon as you indicate such a request.

We are sending a replacement pastor immediately. You are no longer welcome to speak to the assembly from the pulpit, and hopefully you will refrain from private conversations with members and adherents. With your cooperation and by God's grace we will soon rectify all damage occurred.

May the Lord Jesus Christ be with you and your family during this strenuous transition.

Yours in Christ,

The Regional District Board of Directors

Brother Whoever will not only face opposition from his superiors, but also plenty of pew people. While some may be ecstatic at his proposed reforms, others – those most fervently converted to *the*

way it is - will strenuously resist.

Perhaps this threatening backlash from both directions explains the lack of dissident pastors confronting the unholy evangelical system. Perhaps pastors considering serious reform have weighed the consequences and are unwilling to pay the pricey price. Very few of us have the blood of Martin Luther pumping through our veins - which is why evangelicalism is what it is.

T H E S I S # 56

The elder in New Testament writings has very little in common with the elder of evangelicalism. There is no Biblical precedent for a board of elders.

Hebrews 13:17: *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give an account. Let them do so with joy and not grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

Controllers and builders who have managed to secure positions of influence in evangelical churches love Hebrews 13:17. "Those who rule over you" are, obviously, elders. Hebrews 13:17 and similar verses seemingly give the elder authority over the non-elder.

But do they?

Hopefully this chapter will deflate their fantasy.

Acts 5:29: *Peter and the other apostles answered and said: We ought to obey God rather than men.*

This was in response to "the chief priest" who had said to the apostles, "Did we not strictly command you not to preach in this name?" The chief priest was speaking on behalf of "all the elders of the children of Israel". So here we have an example of apostles defying elders.

Certainly there is a major difference between Old Covenant elders and evangelical elders. But they also have much in common....

Neither have impressive records. While the 'Old' guys were quite involved in the murder of our Lord Jesus and afterwards harassed Christ's disciples, the 'New' guys are responsible for the evolution of various debilitating religions. As the *Old* elders fiercely defended their unreasonable religions, the *New* guys likewise defend theirs.

Throughout the church of Christ there are good leaders (some very good) and bad leaders (some very bad). Hopefully more and more evangelicals will imitate "Peter and the other apostles" by defying salaried officers of *the way it is* by likewise declaring: *We ought to obey God rather than men.*

Does the church elder have authority over non-elders?

Let's look at the "churches of Galatia"….

The Galatians fell from so high ("You ran well") to so low ("You have become estranged from Christ"). Paul asked the Galatians, "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" And, "Who has bewitched you?"

Yes, who?

Were those responsible for this spiritual decay non-elders or elders? It couldn't have been non-elders because they lacked necessary influence. It must have been influential elders.

And yet Paul didn't single out the elders for blame, didn't even mention them throughout his letter. How could this be? Obviously Paul did not consider the elders as having authority over the "churches of Galatia". How can we conclude otherwise?

Now let's look at "the church of God which is at Corinth"….

1 Corinthians 1:11,12: *There are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."*

1 Corinthians 5:1: *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles.*

Again, Paul did not specifically blame the elders of the church for the poor spiritual condition of the church. Didn't once use the words "elder" or "overseer" or "leader" or "whatever".

Paul's letters were addressed to "those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus" and to "the church of God" – to everyone, non-elders and elders. Everyone was responsible for the outcome of the church. How can we conclude otherwise?

Also, Paul never mentioned elders in his letters to the Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians or Thessalonians. Instead he mentions "the brethren" several dozens of times. Within the ranks of "the brethren" were many elders. These elders were not given special attention or recognition. Paul treated all equally. On a scale of significance of one to ten (regarding the question of authority of elders) this has to rate nine or ten. If a group within the group had a special authority over the others it would most definitely have been suggested in Paul's writings to various churches.

And what do the gospels say regarding church elders?

Nada.

Most significantly, the words in red (the words of our Savior) give no hint regarding human spiritual authority in Christ's church. Instead, Lord Jesus seems to suggest otherwise….

Matthew 20:25,26: *The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant.*

Lord Jesus said what He meant and meant what He said: "Those who are great" in the church are not to "exercise authority over" the not-so-great.

Matthew 23:8 (NLT): *All of you are equal as brothers and sisters.*

Again, Lord Jesus said what He meant and meant what He said: We are "equal as brothers and sisters." Not one above or below the other.

When there is an argument (with others and with oneself), when Scripture *seems* to argue with Scripture, it is a wise practice to let the words of the Lord Jesus Christ be the umpire. Always give special attention to the words in red.

Red letters can be found in Revelation, chapters 1 to 3. Long after His church had been established, the Lord sent messages to "the seven churches". As Paul's letters to various churches, Christ's messages to the seven churches *do not mention elders* or any other type of church leadership. This also has to rate high on the scale of significance. If a group within the group had an authority over others - a mediator of sorts between believer and Christ - such a thought would have been disclosed in Christ's words of rebuke and commendation to the seven.

Yes, Lord Jesus said what He meant and meant what He said: All in the seven churches were equally guilty and equally commendable - "equal as brothers and sisters".

And yet Hebrews 13:17 ("Obey those who rule over you") must mean *something*.

Let's look at a more digestible translation from the NLT….

Hebrews 13:17: *Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be to your benefit.*

There's a big difference between a ruler (as translated in the NKJV: "those who rule over you") and a leader (as translated in the NLT: "your spiritual leaders"). A ruler is a leader, but a leader is not necessarily a ruler.

A school principal is a ruler; a tourist guide is a leader.

And the fact elders "are accountable to God" doesn't rank them higher; we are all accountable.

Hebrews 13:7 (NLT): *Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.*

Paul's words, "follow the example of their faith" are congenial to Peter's admonition to elders, "not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples."

"Being examples." That's how christians gives leadership to christians. "Not as being lords" but by "being examples".

So who are my leaders?

Christ is your leader.

Matthew 23:10 (NASB): *Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.*

In a very limited sense you have christian leaders, but in a much loftier and truer sense you have One Leader. Emphasis should be placed on the leadership of Christ, not the leadership of christians.

Your leaders are elders "who taught you the word of God." We have been influenced to think of a spiritual leader as the fellow behind the pulpit sunday mornings – and certainly that could be so - but not the elder brother across the table at *Starbucks*.

You are a leader (not a ruler) when you teach/preach the (rightly divided) word of God to whosoever. And your leaders are the whosoevers who teach/preach the (rightly divided) word of

God to you.

So why were there New Testament elders?

First of all, the term elder can refer both to an elderly man or it can refer to a man of superior knowledge and understanding.

1 Peter 5:1: *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder.*

1 Peter 5:2: *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers.*

It seems Peter was saying: *Being an older fella, I entreat you older fellows - who, because of your age and maturity, have the respect of the church - to give oversight to the others, especially the younger people. Make sure you transmit the truths of Christ, as relayed through the apostles, to your group.*

Probably the gentile converts, who did not possess our New Testament and perhaps not even the Old, were unaware of many spiritual truths of which we are quite familiar. Maybe they never heard of Abraham or Moses or Isaiah, never read the psalms or proverbs, couldn't tell you the names of most of the apostles. In time, the New Testament would be compiled, but until then elders (etcetera) were needed to relay spiritual truths.

We cannot assume all apostles appointed elders in the churches. We know Paul did (through Timothy and Titus), but there is no suggestion Peter or John or the others did. Perhaps Paul's appointed elders were simply those older. We do know wives (nearly half the church?) were to submit, primarily, to their husbands, not to elders. And the chief responsibility of children was to "honor father and mother".

We are to "obey spiritual leaders" only when they transmit the will and dictates of God. Doing so is obeying Christ, not His messengers. When John was instructed by our Lord to "write in a book and send it to the churches" the recipients would not be obedient (or disobedient) to that apostle, but rather Jesus Himself.

To those who know and practice the will of God, there is no need for elders. They themselves are elders.

Elders do not conduct the gathering of the saints, dictating who can speak when. Elders were never meant to replace the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the christian's life, but rather just the opposite - to point the believer to the governance of the Holy Spirit. In our church age, elders – we are talking those acknowledged to be elders (including pastors, board members, teachers, superintendents, etcetera) - often work in unison to usurp the lordship of Christ as expressed through His most Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 5:5: *All of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility.*

Elders must defer to non-elders as non-elders are to defer to them, and everybody is to defer to everybody. The only competition within Christ's church should be christians competing to 'out-servant' each other.

T H E S I S # 57

The evangelical should not consider himself (herself) to be what God never made him (her) to be. He is not a layman, not an evangelical, not a protestant, not a denominational person, not a charismatic, not a pentecostal, baptist, etc.

(And not an 'ordained' minister. And not a 'reverend'. And not a 'doctor'.)

We are what Christ made us to be by His redeeming sacrifice. Nothing more. Nothing less.

1 Corinthians 7:23: *You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.*

Evangelicals (etcetera) have given themselves over to that from which they now need to be set free. Because those "bought with a price" wanted to be part of something bigger than their Christ, they are now burdened with a shared identity: Christ and something else.

Seriously handicapped is the Christ-plus christian.

Galatians 6:13 (NLT): *They only want you to be circumcised so they can boast about it and claim you as their disciples.*

The rancher would rather have a thousand cattle bearing his brand than a mere hundred, and this has more to do than profit. Ranchers measure themselves and each other by numbers, same as athletes by trophies won, same as fishermen by fish caught.

There are many who want to brand you, to claim you as theirs, to put you to good use advancing their cause. You give increase to their coveted respect and influence. You make them bigger. Hopefully after many sundays under their pulpit ministry you will be an accomplished ambassador of their slant of christianity.

Acts 20:30 (NLT): *Even some men from your own group will rise up to distort the truth in order to draw a following.*

Paul was prophesying to "the elders of the church" of Ephesus. "For three years did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" about "some men from own group", men who would "distort the truth", men whose purpose would be "to draw a following" after themselves – which necessitates drawing them away from Lord Jesus.

The Ephesians teach us those passionate for Christ today will not necessarily be passionate for Christ tomorrow. The heart of man then is the heart of man now. We are what they are, think what they think, want what they want. They teach us that in our ranks are a dreadful some who would draw disciples after themselves if given the opportunity.

The Ephesians were doing well. Of them Paul wrote, "I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints." And then they were not doing well. Jesus said to them (Revelation 2:4), "You have left your first love." Paul prophesied rightly.

Acts 20: 29 (NLT): *I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock.*

Paul *knew* false teachers would come. "Vicious wolves" always come for delicious sheep. Elders are supposed to protect the flock, but they didn't always (and don't always). Paul prophesied the Ephesus church would be under assault from insiders and outsiders. Sheep must learn to protect themselves by staying close to the only dependable elder brother, the Lord Jesus.

Their safety was to remain in Christ…. alone. Our safety is to remain in Christ…. alone. Christ, not Christ-plus. An evangelical is a steer branded with two brands, belonging to two lords. The percentage of christians who go back to old ways is very high. They are like the light of a candle that eventually flickers in desperation and soon after expires. So very foolish and so very unnecessary.

Paul spoke in tongues, but he wasn't a pentecostal. John baptized multitudes, including our Lord, but he wasn't a baptist. We can have several gifts of the Holy Spirit without being a charismatic. One can attend an evangelical church without being an evangelical.

Overcomers have but one brand. They identify with Christ alone. They stand fast against the adders and subtracters, the compromisers and negotiators. Overcomers are not shy to proclaim: *I am Christ's and Christ's alone. I am not a pentecostal, baptist, evangelical or one of many etceteras. I have one Lord, and Him alone I do serve.*

T H E S I S # 58

The evangelical should consider himself to be only what the Bible declares him to be – an adopted child of God, a disciple of Christ, a joint heir with Christ, blood-washed, sanctified, justified.

Exclamation marks (!) should not be overused or their purpose loses meaning.

Where we place exclamation marks – where we display enthusiasm - indicates our level of spirituality. There is something wrong with, "I lost my diamond earring!!!!" Or, "I won a trip to wherever!!!!" Or, "We trounced the other team!!!!" And there is something equally amiss with, "My neighbor accepted Christ." Or, "I am a temple of the Holy Spirit." Or, "A brother was healed of cancer."

In discussing thesis # 58 it would be most difficult to overuse exclamation marks.

What the Bible declares us to be is astounding. Therefore we should be astounded. The reason we are not astounded is because we don't fully get it. My head knows, but my heart doesn't realize. Someone has said, "We don't need to be taught as much as we need to be reminded." So….

So let's look again at our great salvation….

1 John 3:1: *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God*

Yes we should behold, and behold, and behold again and again until we get it: We are actual, real, authentic sons and daughters of the living God!!!!

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

The Holy Spirit confirms what *The Word* clearly says: We are actual, real, authentic sons and daughters of the living God!!!!

Romans 8:15: *You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father"*

We don't call Him "Father" because a church academic informed us we are His children, but rather *the Spirit Himself* prompts us to call Him, "Abba, Father".

Romans 8:17: *And if children then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*

We are actually, *through* Christ, heirs *with* Christ!!!! Only actual, real, authentic sons and daughters of the living God are heirs of God!!!!

And the salvation story gets better….

Philippians 1:1: *To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.*

How did the saints of Philippi become saints? - the same way you and I became saints…. through Christ. The New Testament calls believers saints many times…. because we *are* saints!!!! We may not always be saintly, but we are always saints!!!!

Colossians 1:3: *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*

Delivered from the power of darkness!!!! We are saved!!!! Eternally saved!!!! "I once was lost but now am found"!!!! No longer are we children of "the god of this age"!!!! No longer is the devil our spiritual father!!!! No longer under condemnation!!!! No longer on that "broad…. way that leads to destruction" !!!!

We have passed from death to life!!!!

We have passed from death to life!!!!

Romans 5:9: *Having now been justified by His blood*

Since there is no such thing as *partially* justified, we must be *fully* justified. That person in the mirror is fully justified!!!! As if she never sinned!!!! She is as pure as the angels!!!! In right standing with God!!!! An actual, real, authentic daughter of the living God!!!!

And it just keeps on getting better….

2 Corinthians 5:21: *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the*

righteousness of God in Him

We are the righteousness of God!!!! Really!!!! Righteousness was imputed upon us that very moment we were "born of the Spirit"!!!! And it's all because of our Lord Jesus!!!! He did what no man could do – He made us to be righteous in the eyes of our Father!!!! Because of Lord Jesus we have continual access to the Father's throne!!!!

1 Corinthians 15:51 (NLT): *We will all be transformed*

We will be transformed, just like Jesus was!!!! A heavenly body awaits us!!!! No more sickness!!!! No more confusion!!!! No aging!!!!

And it *still* gets better….

1 Corinthians 6:19 (NLT): *Don't you realize your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you?*

What's this?!!!! God lives in me?!!!! My body is a dwelling place of the most Holy Spirit?!!!!

And better….

Revelation 21:2 (The Amplified): *I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, all arrayed like a bride beautified and adorned for her husband*

New Jerusalem awaits us!!!! Our eternal home!!!! With Jesus!!!! With the Father!!!! With Paul and John and Peter and the prophets!!!! With many loved ones!!!!

1 John 3:1: *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us.*

Our place is to behold. To consider. To live in the awareness of. To appreciate. To acknowledge. To

be amazed.

To give thanks!!!!

T H E S I S # 59

The evangelical is hindered by the low expectation placed upon him by church leadership (and by fellow 'laymen'). He has little chance of fulfilling the high calling of God on his life, or even coming to the realization of what that calling is.

It has been suggested an adult is a child in stretched skin. While that may be an exaggeration, adults and children do have much in common. Both, to varying degrees, are shepherded through life by the expectations of others.

The university graduate was, probably, expected to become a university graduate, while the minimum wage guy, probably, was not. The expectations placed on a child often determine the outcome of the adult.

Pre-christian believers were shepherded through life by "the law". ("Now we have been delivered from *the law.*") The evangelical (etcetera) should be guided through life by the Holy Spirit, but instead has given himself over to the governance of christians (who have given themselves over to the governance of christians).

Pulpits and pews, while practical things, emit harmful inferences. For example, the pulpit guy is stationed behind the pulpit by divine appointment, and pew people are his audience by God's decree. The pew people look to their spokesman to determine what is expected of them; the response seems to be, "Not much."

To escape this harmful mentality ("Not much."), it would be helpful to understand the power of *the way it is*. We have been (mis-) taught the sovereignty of God. We have learned that 'God has everything under control' and therefore *the way it is* must be God's doing. Concerning the affairs of the church, our Jesus has high expectations for 'the man of God', and much less for the rest.

Merf and Mannie (See note.) help give a contrary spiritual overview of the local church.

Church and Merf don't get along too good simply because church and Merf are going different directions. Everybody (and every group) is on the move, becoming, changing, either losing ground or gaining. No one is fixed. Merf is gaining Christ, church is descending deeper into lukewarmness.

It's not a steady backsliding; there are times when church bounces back heading for higher ground they once held. They had even brought in a revivalist, but he seemed to cause division, and church decided they would rather be united than fervent. If one could chart the spirituality of Merf's church, like most churches it would look like a failing stock that has occasional upward bounces, but the general trend is down, down, down.

People going down resent people going up, sibling jealousy perhaps. Christians who do not want (an intimate and meaningful relationship with) Christ don't want to hang with those who do. Water seeks its own level.

The pastor is resentful because he senses Merf doesn't need him. Pastor's perspective: *If we are all going in the right direction (and of course we are), and Merf is going in a different direction, Merf must be going the wrong way.* He's nervous that whatever Merf's got might be contagious, and he is quite protective of the flock in his charge.

Now everyone knows when the pastor is less than enthusiastic about someone, and making buds with that someone puts them at risk; no one wants the pastor's disapproval - all need his approval to serve and be accepted. So poor Merf is a bit lonely and getting lonelier.

Merf threatens unity because he doesn't place himself under the authority (yes, the black kind) of leadership. Not that Merf would ever be disruptive or do anything dumb, but he has this air of independence, seems to live in another world. Whatever makes him tick, it certainly isn't church.

Not that Merf doesn't enjoy church, he does…. somewhat. He looks forward to praise and worship time when heaven seems to open up a bit. And he does learn from the man behind the pulpit, especially guest speakers. He likes to linger after a good service and bask in the manifested Presence. On the other hand….

Merf just doesn't fit in, doesn't want to fit in, finds himself being critical of just about everything. *Why do we have to have the same guy preaching sunday after sunday after sunday? How can a man preach for almost an hour and rarely mention Christ? Is this what the New Testament church was like? Seems to me if the Holy Spirit were really in control the service wouldn't be so boring. Why don't we experience the power of God instead of just reading about it?* "Shut up, Merf!" Merf says to Merf.

Often Merf daydreams while the pastor preaches. Quite an imagination, that boy….

He sees each in the congregation, after praise time, reach for a muzzle from the row of black muzzles hanging neatly on the back of the pews in front of the pew-warmers, watches them all put the muzzle over their mouths, quite proficiently Merf notices, like they've done this a thousand times. *They sure look silly,* Merf chuckles to himself, and he knows if he had a mirror he would see himself equally so. Mannie can't figure why her man has that silly little grin during preach time. And, *Why does he look at me like that, like there's something wrong with my face?*

So they are all muzzled, all except one, the pastor. No one muzzles the pastor, not even his wife. He gets to say funny things, talk about what a good week he has had - though very busy doing his pastoral duties - and expound his spiritual insights. He pampers, jokes, corrects and scolds to his heart's content.

Merf is the only one in the church who sees the denominational biggies seated behind the pastor, each suited and tie-d and sparkly and somber. Only Merf and the pastor know these guys follow the pastor around wherever he goes, be it preaching, counseling, playing tennis, relaxing in his recliner soaking in unbelief from the box, whatever. They are his lord, and to them does he bow, and in them he abides.

P a u l : *To whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves.* (Rom.6:6)

Also, Merf is the only one to notice the ball and chain attached to the pastor's ankle. And the men behind him, they have one too. As does almost everyone in the congregation (almost everyone, there are exceptions in every church), including the little lady beside him.

Mannie? Little? You see, Mannie is a midget, just like most others in the building, including the guys in front. The midgets, though midgets, are not all the same height, all are according to their spiritual maturity. As Merf scans the people he spots the few giants, their grand stature obvious only to him and to each other.

Merf notices the pastor getting annoyed whenever one of the midgets carelessly crosses his legs and rattles his chain. The men behind him are careful to cross their legs soundlessly, not wanting anyone to know they are in the building.

Merf's ball and chain lies stretched out on the stage next to the pulpit, M E R F in bold letters on the ball, ankle-lock wide open, pining the return of its once captive. And then Merf's imagination really gets going. The pastor picks up the ball and chain in outstretched hands and looks longingly at Merf. All the muzzled midgets, always so very supportive of their pastor, noisily stand and turn - *clink, clink, clink, clink* - to gaze at Merf with equal longing, all silently chorusing their plea, "Won't you join us, Merf? Won't you come back?"

To Merf's horror he feels himself drawn to the ball and chain he recently escaped. The muzzled, distraught faces, the pleading eyes, the outstretched arms of welcome even from the dignitaries up front, magnified the drawing power humans have upon humans. The people began to rattle their chains in unison, and mesmerized Merf slowly rises from his seat, makes his way to the aisle and heads repentantly to the altar. (Not your typical altar call, is it?)

Mannie's elbow in Merf's ribs saved Merf from the M E R F ball and chain, waking him from his terror. "What's with you, Merf?" now muzzleless Mannie demands. "You've got beads of sweat on your forehead!"

Songs sung, tithes taken, announcements announced, preaching preached, the people, muzzleless and shackleless and tall once again, are rejuvenated for at least a couple of hours, and the released

chatterers chatter enthusiastically in the large foyer about nothing spiritually relevant.

1. W. T o z e r : *It is hard to have any insight and not be considered a cynic. It is hard to be a realist and not be classed with the pessimists.* (Who Put Jesus On the Cross)

C h a l l e n g e : *If you follow the crowd and the crowd is not following Christ, neither are you. Jesus said, "Come, follow Me."*

P r a y e r : *Lord Jesus, we say, "Yes, Lord." By the grace You so freely give we respond to Your beckoning. And we say, "More grace, Jesus."* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Thanks, Merf. You too, Mannie.

Perspective must come from the Bible. One cannot allow the expectations of peers-in-Christ to shepherd us through our christianity. Defective perspectives have seriously damaged the evangelical, making her to be something she ain't, and hindering her from being what Christ called her to be.

Intangible fences are as confining as those topped with barbed wire. Overcomers are those who overcome illicit restrictions of *the way it is*, this accomplished by the power released at Calvary on our behalf.

To escape embarrassment at "the judgment seat", we must build our lives on the rock of His words, not the sands of traditional reasoning.

Note: Merf and Mannie are imaginary friends who have agreed to star in the series of articles, "Far and Near", available at larryjones.ca

T H E S I S # 60

The fruit one bears is relative to the quality of relationship with Jesus Christ, not the quality of relationship with one's church.

When most of us read a book we forget more than we retain.

Superior books are subject to purposeful abuse - critical phrases and sentences underlined, notes scribbled in the columns, question marks and exclamations – all indications of the reader's intent to dig out as much treasure as possible. And the reader returns year after year until the author's insights are fully screened and digested.

Of the 95 theses, # 60 is the most critical. If you forget 1 to 59 and 61 to 95 it could be unfortunate but not critical. But if the truth of 60 is missed, if you fail to realize the importance of relationship with your Sin-bearer, if relationship with others is nurtured more religiously than your relationship with Lord Jesus, your earthly christianity and your entire eternity will be greatly impoverished. Guaranteed.

Please give special consideration to thesis # 60.

Lord Jesus had messages for "the seven churches which are in Asia" (Revelation, chapters 1 to 3), most of them stinging and a few complimentary. Lord Jesus also has a message for each of us, but only those having "ears to hear" have the ability to hear.

There is only one way to ensure the Lord Jesus has no stinging words of rebuke: Retain your "first love" as first love. In other words, love Jesus more than every other person or any pastime or habit or addiction. In other words, outlaw idols, human and otherwise.

For many, the value of relationship with "the Son of His love" was greatest at conversion. Because of multiple strains of life and the deceitful glitter of the world and/or religion, relationship has

devalued.

Christians live in dangerous times. Addictive smut is a few clicks away. Ever-present, well-disguised religions compete for our affection and allegiance. Evangelicals fellowship with evangelicals, the confused with the confused, and sit under the ministry of those who have swapped the lordship of Christ for ecclesiastical lords.

Yes, we live in dangerous times. It has always been so throughout church history, but perhaps for us the level of danger is much elevated. We must stay close to stay protected. Straying from our Shepherd is straying from protection. Straying from His protection is inviting calamity.

Both the consistently faithful and the one who has foolishly wandered and wisely returned are overcomers. There is no concern for rebuke from the Master, even though they may (will?) do dumb often. The Lord looks at the heart, and if He sees loyalty and effort He is satisfied. In the letters to the seven, there was no reprimand for overcomers.

Revelation has much to say about "him who overcomes".

Within the seven churches were both the overcome and the overcomer. And, of course, both are in our 21st century church, the one far outnumbering the other. It is so silly to be overcome when we can easily become an overcomer through repentance.

The overcomer will never hear what many of the seven churches heard….

He will never hear, "Nevertheless I have this against you."

She will never hear, "I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent."

He will never hear, "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

She will never hear, “I have not found your works perfect before God.”

He will never hear, “Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

She will never hear, “That the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed.”

He will never hear, “Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

Some might balk at the suggestion the Lord Jesus would speak to an evangelical in such a stern manner, yet He did say, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”

“Rebuke and chasten.”

The overcomer, the one whose first love is Lord Jesus, has no need for rebuke or chastening. Instead he is a recipient of many promises….

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name.”

"He who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations."

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world."

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God."

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne."

Obviously it's imperative to understand what an overcomer is….

The word 'overcome' suggests a struggle against a formidable enemy. Resentment, unforgiveness, unbelief, envy, fear, lust, religion, pride, love of leisure, love of money – these are all formidable enemies that have successfully subdued most.

An overcomer is the one who does not allow any person or any circumstance, good or bad, to pry him away from "first love". An overcomer is the sheep contentedly feeding on pasture near *The Good Shepherd*. An overcomer is the one quick to repent. An overcomer is the branch firmly attached to *The Vine*.

There is much wrong with evangelicalism (etcetera). But if every evangelical simply bowed to the Biblical truth of thesis # 60, not only would evangelicalism be greatly reformed, it would actually cease to be.

T H E S I S # 61

Every christian has the calling of either apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, in varying degrees of anointing. Each is called to minister the Word to the church and to the world.

Ephesians 4:11: *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*

"Some…. some…. some…. some."

Who, within evangelicalism, are "some"?

The licensed and titled and salaried would suggest the licensed and titled and salaried are "some". Their interpretation is simple: *Some* means *few*, and if not *few* than at least *less than all*, and therefore Ephesians 4:11 cannot refer to every believer. Spiritual elitism so evident in gospel churches (and other churches) is buoyed by this pet verse.

But there is another interpretation (perhaps more valid?) that allows *every* born-again believer to be included in these five preaching ministry gifts….

You come across a notice in the newspaper: *The Vegan Club of Carrot County held their annual banquet last night. It was a good turnout, about 50 people. Some brought vegetable salads, some brought homemade vegetable juice, some cooked vegetable stews, and some fruit salads and pies.*

"Some…. some…. some…. some."

You can see "some" could be a few, many, most, or all (although it seems everyone brought something). Same with Ephesians 4:11 – "some" could be few, many, most, or all. To determine which of the four possibilities is most likely, we simply have to peruse the preceding and ensuing verses.

Ephesians 4:7: *To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

"Each one of us" tells us grace was given *to all*. In what design was (is) grace given?

Ephesians 4:8: *Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."*

"Grace" of Ephesians 4:7 was given in the design of "gifts" in 4:8. If all were given grace, and this grace was 'packaged' in gifts, therefore all were given at least one gift. (And therefore so were you.)

What gifts?

Ephesians 4:11: *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*

These gifts are what could be called *preaching* gifts, because they require preaching. It seems a secure conclusion that all were (are) given at least one preaching gift.

Ephesians 4:12: *For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.*

"The work of ministry" is preaching. Who ministers? "The saints" (that's *all* the saints) were to be equipped for ministry (equipped for preaching).

Equipped by whom? Equipped by Christ through christians, all of whom have been endowed with preaching gifts. We equip each other.

Ephesians 4:14: *That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro…*

Ephesians 4:15: *But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up…*

Note: The "we" (all believers) of 4:14 are the same ones "speaking the truth" in 4:15. "Speaking the truth" is preaching. All believers are called to be preachers.

Ephesians 4:16: *From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies…*

"Every joint" is every believer.

Ephesians 4:16: *According to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body…*

Who "causes growth of the body"? "Every part" (every christian).

So back to….

Ephesians 4:11: *He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*

So can you find yourself in Ephesians 4:11? "Seek, and you will find"?

It seems clear *every* believer is included in these five preaching-ministry gifts; get this and your christianity will be greatly enhanced. Freedom from low expectations of others is for those who see themselves from the perspective of *The Word*.

Ephesians 4:7: *To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

Paul *seems* to be saying Christ's gifts have varying degrees of anointing. This we can see for ourselves by observing christians, some having a heavier anointing than others. (It would be a mistake to assume the pulpit guy has a more bountiful anointing than most, although such is quite possible.) *The Teacher* has taught us there is advancement for faithful stewards of our talents (read

Matthew, chapter 25).

It's important to realize Paul did not give us these verses so we can switch our gaze from Lord Jesus to ourselves and the gifts He has given. The church is overly gift conscious. No, our focus should be firmly fixed on "the *Apostle* and High Priest of our confession", "the *prophet* from Nazareth", "the Lord of the harvest ", "the good shepherd ", "your *teacher*, the Christ".

The going mentality seems to be: Identify your gift and fulfill that ministry. Wrong. It *isn't* necessary to identify the gift (or gifts) the Lord has deposited in you. To live successfully, your identity must always be in Christ Jesus, not in a particular function.

We are to learn surrender to the Holy Spirit, and let Him unfold our lives. Such is healthy christianity. Only then will life "be done decently and in order." The prophet will find himself prophesying, the evangelist will be evangelizing, the pastor…. well, you know.

If everyone understood every believer is called to preach, ugly elitism within the church of Jesus Christ would lose its strength.

Your preaching, to be effective, must emerge from prayer. Spend more time preparing your heart than your head. The world and the church have little use for another dry-eyed intellectual.

There is no need to be your own door opener, to scheme opportunities, to elicit contacts with the influential, to be politically correct. Such is the opposite of childlike trust in the only One you need. True loyalty to Christ is doing things His way even if you thought His way would not bear good fruit. (Yes, such is impossible.)

If dependence is on Him alone, you will serve Him alone.

If you are the branch firmly attached to *The Vine*, the Holy Spirit will, in due time, use you to proclaim "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" to the world and to His own. Guaranteed.

So happy preaching, brother! Happy preaching, sister!

T H E S I S # 62

It is an insult to Christ to consider or call a man Pastor. (Pastor means shepherd.) Jesus reproved those who called men Father and Teacher. Had it been their custom to call men Pastor, Jesus would have likewise corrected them.

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(See note.) You call the man *Pastor* because everyone else calls the man *Pastor*.

John is *Pastor* John, Jack is *Pastor* Jack and Joe is *Pastor* Joe because John, Jack and Joe taught you to call them *Pastor*.

There are practical reasons for calling the man *Pastor*, but a much more significant reason not to…. the Lord Jesus Christ forbids it. Listen to your Master:

"DO NOT BE CALLED 'RABBI'; FOR ONE IS YOUR TEACHER, THE CHRIST, AND YOU ARE ALL BRETHREN.

"DO NOT CALL ANYONE ON EARTH YOUR FATHER; FOR ONE IS YOUR FATHER, HE WHO IS IN HEAVEN.

"AND DO NOT BE CALLED TEACHERS; FOR ONE IS YOUR TEACHER, THE CHRIST."

True, the Lord Jesus does not specifically outlaw calling a man *Pastor*, but let us reason together….

In these three verses in Matthew 23, various translators use a variety of words expressing what they believe to be forbidden titles: *rabbi, teacher, master, father, instructor, leader, director.* The Lord Jesus did not specify *pastor* because it was not the custom to call religious leaders by that title.

Nonetheless, He said enough for you to 'get the picture' if you want to 'get the picture'.

And if you don't you won't.

For those who don't and won't, consider: If it were the evangelical practice to call the man *Lord* would you call the man *Lord?* And if not, why not? After all, our High Priest did not instruct us, "DO NOT CALL ANYONE ON EARTH" *Lord*.

If you call Whoever *Pastor* Whoever simply because everyone else does, and even occasionally refer to him as *Reverend*, you would surely call him *Lord* Whoever if that were the custom.

No way!, you say. *Jesus is my only Lord, and I would never call any man* Lord*!*

Really? How many shepherds do you have (*pastor*, as you know, means *shepherd*)? And yet you call several men Shepherd, an insult to the good Shepherd who proved His love at Calvary.

You have one pastor; His name is Jesus.

Note: This is taken from a series of articles, *333* WORDS…. *Exactly* (www.333words.org).

T H E S I S # 63

The evangelical is accountable to Jesus Christ alone, and not any man. Peter was not accountable to John, and John was not accountable to James; they were each accountable to Christ.

Evangelicals (etcetera) can give an account to anyone they so choose. What is important to note is the Lord Jesus does not require such an account, nor does *The Word* suggest it.

Giving an account to one another is, it seems, a *recent invention*, that is, recent in terms of church history. The purpose, it seems, is to keep everyone on the straight and narrow.

Yet keeping on the straight and narrow isn't christianity. True christianity is walking with Jesus.

We do not want surface holiness. We want a holiness that emerges from a changed heart, which emerges from a healthy bonding to our Lord Jesus, which emerges from ongoing effort and determination.

An apology has much more power as a binding agent to Christ than most accountings. It is so hard to apologize; it must be because apologies are so seldom given. Too bad, because an apology could do wonders in our quest for more of Him. An apology takes lots of humility resulting in dying to self, a necessary ingredient to living for Christ.

When was the last time a christian said to you, "I am sorry. I was wrong. I was not upright with you. Please forgive me."? And when was the last time you said similar words to others?

Christians wrongfully slight christians often, and yet acknowledgement of unfair treatment is rare. Why? Simple pride? A man will fast forty days but never say, "I am sorry", though the "I am sorry" is possibly more potent than the forty day fast.

Another powerful tool is admitting our sins and shortcomings. "Confess your trespasses one to another." Instead many (not you and I, of course) confess their strengths and good deeds - not blatantly, but 'accidentally' letting them slip out.

Romans 14:12: *Each of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Oh-oh.

T H E S I S # 64

Everyone can recapture the fervor for Jesus he had at rebirth. There is more of Christ for the evangelical wanting more of Christ. Attaining more of Christ could necessitate removing one's loyalty from man and placing that loyalty back onto Jesus.

It was a hot summer evening in 1972, the year I was "born of the Spirit". I was young, I was catholic (sort of), and I was hungry for more of Jesus.

I discovered a small group of catholics in a little chapel-like building, must have been a hundred years old, beside the large catholic church near downtown Kelowna. I was amazed to see fellow catholics enthusiastically praising Jesus with uplifted hands.

One of the songs included the words, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back." It was a meaningful prayer of loyalty to our Lord, and we all sang with much heart. It was beautiful. Until….

Until we came to the words, "Though none go with me, still I will follow, no turning back, no turning back." That's when the Holy Spirit deposited an explicit message into me that was quite disturbing. This message wasn't in words, but rather an impression, a foretelling of a future happening, the gist of it something like this:

There would be a day when I would have opportunity to prove the words I was singing ("Though none go with me, still I will follow")*.*

In other words there would be a time when *everybody* in my entire circle of christian acquaintances would cease following Jesus! Would I still follow Jesus "though none go with me"?

The reason this message was so scary is because I *did* 'hear' it and because what I heard seemed impossible and grim. There is no way every christian I was associated with was going to stop following Christ. Impossible.

A year or so later the Holy Spirit arrived at my own parish, *St. Theresa's Church*. Same fervor, same joy, same expressions of praise unto Jesus. Years later, after me and my family escaped catholicism, we entered evangelicalism. Same fervor, same joy, same expressions of praise unto Jesus. My wife

and I attended Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship banquets once a month for two or three years. Same fervor, same joy, same expressions of praise unto Jesus.

Indeed the Holy Spirit was moving in phenomenal ways throughout our city, doing the same great work here as He was doing throughout North America and beyond. The seventies and eighties were an amazing time of a Holy Spirit visitation rarely matched in church history.

In time my focus shifted from Jesus to influential christians, from Jesus to people a lot more knowledgeable that me, from Jesus to the swelling ranks of spiritual globetrotters.

There is a saying, "Like priest, like people." We will eventually become like our leaders. We will talk like them, talk about them, pray like them, follow them.

To follow another we must stop following the One we are following. And so I did. Though forewarned way back in '72, I had stopped following Jesus. As you can see, I am not the hero type. When I realized my horrible disloyalty to Lord Jesus I repented and headed back toward my 1972 fervency, a journey of about two years or so.

The veil keeping me from seeing my spiritual poverty also prevented me from seeing that of others. When the veil was lifted I could not only see myself, but I could see into those around me. It wasn't pretty. I felt they were more messed up than I was.

Catholicism had swallowed up the wondrous Holy Spirit happening within its ranks, not only in Kelowna but most (all?) places in Canada and beyond. The evangelical church I attended was going through an ugly split. My next church bordered on man-worship. There was serious infighting within the Businessmen's Fellowship. The 'Word of Faith movement' (whose insignia could rightfully be a dollar sign) infiltrated the FGBIF, turning businessmen from pleasant to greedy. In my rather wide circle of christianity there was theft, accusations, misunderstandings, adultery, you name it. Spiritual compromisers and negotiators and controllers had taken charge. (God bless them all.)

The Lord gave me insights based on Matthew 12:34, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." To know the heart of a man listen to his words. To know the heart of a group (church, family,

etcetera) listen to their words. And so I listened….

Jesus was rarely mentioned, although just a few years previous His Name poured out of His people like a fountain. Surprisingly, even pulpit people avoided *The Name*. One might wonder how a christian can dodge Jesus in his forty-five minute sermon; simply said, what's not in can't come out. Their preaching exposed their Jesus-impoverished hearts. (God bless them all.)

"Like priest, like people." Betrayal of Christ spread rapidly from pulpits to pews, from writers to readers. I am satisfied my prophecy of that summer of 1972 was fulfilled. It seems there was actually a time in my christianity whereby not one born-again followed Christ. Not one. Some were following catholicism, some evangelicalism, others a spiritual celebrity, and some chose the lordship of self. But not one was following Lord Jesus.

Most certainly those who did not follow Christ assumed they did, and would be insulted by an otherwise suggestion. Yet their speech gave them away. ("Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.") And so did their actions.

Now I must be quick to say everyone (at least most) were still 'christian', their names to be found in the Book of Life. They still had a love (though a diminished love) for Jesus Christ. They had good hearts.

To follow Christ means to follow Christ. It entails sincerely, even fiercely, seeking His will. It requires a continual awareness that He is here, a continued consciousness of His doting love. Following Christ necessitates a complete surrender to His lordship and the governance of His most Holy Spirit.

Today the spiritual landscape, from my perspective, is still bleak, but less so. I know a few who follow Jesus, "no turning back, no turning back".

I have shared this story for your benefit. You may think it a bit unrealistic - that multitudes within evangelicalism (etcetera) are following someone other than Lord Jesus - but it isn't. Most (all?) evangelical church leaders who have read my *95 Theses* as published in our local newspapers are still being called *Pastor Whoever*, continue to collect 'tithes and offerings', wouldn't consider

shedding their titles, would never share the pulpit, and continue to bow to denominational lords. And pew people, with few exceptions, continue to bow to, and financially support, *the way it is*.

Some have recaptured their passion and loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ. Personal revival is a decision away. The difference between the apostle Peter and the apostle Judas is one repented and the other did not. The difference between the overcomer and the overcome is the one repented and the other did not.

T H E S I S # 65

Evangelicals would be wise to repent of compromise, of man-gazing, of giving a reverence to man that belongs to Jesus alone.

Repentance.

It's a mistake to think you can change yourself. And it's a mistake to think God will change you without your okay. He needs your repentance.

Repentance will release the power of God on your behalf. Repentance is the door into sanctification.

Sanctification, then, is the accomplishment of two. Sanctification will not come unless you do your part. You will not do your part unless you have a deep desire to be separated, separated from the world and separated unto Him. The needed desire will come as you consider the beauty of your Christ and the consequences of careless living.

It is wise and right to want a better life. Sanctification ("Be holy, for I am holy") will usher in that better life. So…. repentance is the door to sanctification, and sanctification is the door to a better life than the one you have.

Sanctification does not come in fullness in an instant. Actually, it doesn't come in fullness this side of heaven. Only a perfect man can be fully sanctified. What we pray for is increase, to intermittently be lifted to higher realms of sanctification. Separation is the Lord's doing, doing what we cannot do. What we can do, and must do, is cooperate.

We cooperate by repenting. We are to be quick to repent when the Holy Spirit, in due time (in *His* time), reveals a fault or weakness or sin in our lives.

When we became Christ's we deposited ourselves into His care and lordship, clay in the Potter's loving and capable hands. He lifts us from "glory to glory", from the life we have to a better life…. and then to a better life…. and then to a better life.

A better life is available to all. But what does *better* look like?

Paul lived a better life than most, and his better led to martyrdom. Same with most of the eleven. Jesus led a *perfect* life, resulting in His crucifixion. Better is not tension free, is not leisure, is not approval and acceptance.

Better is more fruit. Better is more love and joy and peace and purpose and answered prayer. Better is, probably, improved health of the body and, most certainly, the soul. Better is more adventures in God, more of the supernatural. More than that….

Better is more of Jesus, and thus more of the Father, and thus more of the Holy Spirit.

Better is loftier than who we now are, and what we do and accomplish. Better carries on into eternity, never fades, is never stolen.

The fact that better is always available to whosoever will go for it is an incredible display of God's incredible love.

You must know, better comes slow. Don't get discouraged. Continued increase is for the diligent and determined.

A better life awaits the repentant. Those refusing to repent are stuck where they're at.

T H E S I S # 66

Revival is simply rededicating oneself, sincerely, to Christ and Scripture. Signing the last page of the Bible as a declaration of obedience to the Bible (as the Holy Spirit gives understanding) will help seal one's commitment.

Revivals are unusual displays of the power and generosity of God. One revival is localized, invigorating a spiritually sleepy town, another shakes an entire country and spills over to other nations. One such revival is known as *The Azusa Street Revival* of Los Angeles, California.

It has been estimated more than 600 million christians worldwide can trace their roots back to Azusa Street where, beginning in 1906, there was an outbreak of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, just like in the Book of Acts. ("And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.")

Another outbreak (mentioned in chapter 64), perhaps equal to Azusa Street, began in the mid-sixties, this one coined *The Charismatic Movement*. Millions of catholics and anglicans and many etceteras were added to the Book of Life through this amazing visitation of the Holy Spirit. Similar to the New Testament church, "God also witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit."

Soon after, another major Holy Spirit visitation, referred to by some as *The Vineyard Movement*, blessed many throughout North America and beyond. Within that movement was *The Toronto Blessing*, an amazing outpouring of God's grace upon a congregation located near Toronto's international airport. Visitors travelled from all over the planet to return home refreshed and reconnected to Lord Jesus. During some services the entire floor of the rather large building was covered with saints 'slain in the Spirit'.

After a revival has passed, many pine for bygone days when the Spirit was so active and christianity so very exciting. But such yearning is unnecessary. One can experience a personal revival by "simply rededicating oneself, sincerely, to Christ and Scripture".

Some visitations can be termed *renewals*, whereby God's thrust is more upon His church than the unsaved. The purpose of a renewal is to draw Christ's own back to Christ. Where passion has declined, it is restored and even amplified. However….

However, every christian can at any time renew and improve her relationship with our Lord Jesus by a simple, meaningful, recommitment to Christ.

It's important to coordinate a commitment to the Lord Jesus with a commitment to *The Word*. A hesitation to make a dual pledge is an indication commitment to either is trite.

It should be noted that revival almost always brings division. For those serving the god of unity, this appears to be bad fruit. But division is sometimes favorable; just ask the parent of the teen who has adverse friends.

Some who felt comfortable in your company will be less so. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

T H E S I S # 67

Only those placing themselves under the lordship of Christ and His Holy Spirit will be rejoicing at the judgment seat of Christ. (2Cor.5:10)

2 Corinthians 5:10: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

"For we." "We" is every christian. (The unsaved will have to appear before the "great white throne" judgment of Revelation 20:12. Sad.)

"For we must." We *must* appear. You and I *will* be there.

"The judgment seat *of Christ*." We will be judged by *The Judge*. Judgment will be accurate and just. "There is no partiality with God."

"We may receive." Receive rewards earned by obedience.

"The things done in the body." This includes our actions and intentions and motives. Obviously, someone is keeping records.

"According to." Possibly this will be your first exact "according to". Down here nothing works perfectly; everything is "according to" plus or minus. But up there everything works well. (At the "great white throne" judgment they will also get their exact "according to". "The dead were judged *according to* their works." Sad.)

"Whether good or bad." We have all done good, and we have all done bad. We have been both smart and dumb, generous and stingy, humble and proud, faithful and unfaithful, diligent and lazy.

1 Corinthians 3:8: *Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*

There is that "according to" again.

Matthew 9:29: *According to your faith let it be to you.*

Your faith down here is determining the value of your eternal future. "Those placing themselves under the lordship of Christ and His Holy Spirit" do so by faith, childlike trust in their Creator and Redeemer.

"According to your faith." Because one has more faith than another, one will receive greater rewards than another. It really is quite simple.

2 Corinthians 5:9: *Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.*

Those "well pleasing to Him" have nothing to dread. Perhaps they will hear those words we should all ache to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things."

Christians "well pleasing to him" are those "placing themselves under the lordship of Christ and His Holy Spirit". Who else could they be?

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NLT): *We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done.*

Do you remember Jesus admonishing us, "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"? Those treasures will be revealed at this time. You will know, exactly, the value of your "treasures", which will be more than some and less than others.

And do you remember Lord Jesus admonishing us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth"? Temporary treasures on earth cost eternal treasures in heaven.

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 (NLT): *For no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have – Jesus Christ. Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials – gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.*

Perhaps, just perhaps, judgment day will look something like this….

Perhaps all your activities on earth will somehow be transformed into six materials – "gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw". It's all there in a large pile in front of you. And here comes *The Judge*.

The Judge isn't stern, but He isn't smiling either. Like all judges, He is grave.

In His hand is a torch. He approaches you and the pile of six building materials set before you. You are nervous. You are *very* nervous. You can't see the gold and silver and jewels, if any, because they are covered with wood and hay and straw.

He touches your (christian) life's collection with the torch, and the fire begins. Lots of stinky smoke from all that wood and all that hay and all that straw spews upward from the fire. Your eyes strain

through smoke and fire, desperate to see if anything survives the test. Will there be noncombustible gold and silver and jewels? And if so, how much?

Yes, how much?

1 Corinthians 3:14 (NLT): *If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.*

There are no ashes when the fuel is exhausted, and your good works in the form of gold and silver and jewels are now bare for all to see. The value of your eternity is revealed.

Here's where "according to" comes into effect. The more that survives the test, the bigger the reward. Keep in mind these rewards are eternal, perhaps indicative of rank.

1 Corinthians 3:15 (NLT): *But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss.*

Probably every christian suffers loss. Only "the Man Christ Jesus" built perfectly. Some builders will suffer extreme loss, while others will be highly rewarded. It's all about "according to".

There will be great rejoicing and great sorrow at the judgment seat of Christ. What percentage will be rejoicing, and what percentage will be sorrowing? The answer is all around us: What percentage, here and now, are laying up "treasures in heaven", and what percentage are laying up "treasures on earth"?

"Only those placing themselves under the lordship of Christ and His Holy Spirit will be rejoicing at the judgment seat of Christ."

T H E S I S # 68

Jesus: Freely you have received, freely give. (Mt.10:8) Selling spiritual teachings, revelations, testimonies and songs in written, audio and video design is contrary to Matthew 10:8. Admittance fees to conferences, seminars and concerts are contrary to Matthew 10:8. Selling one's christian service is contrary to Matthew 10:8.

And yet Lord Jesus said, "A worker is worthy of his food."

How does one balance the words of Christ, "Freely give" and "A worker is worthy of his food"?

After the evangelist preached and prayed for the sick, she declared, "I have done my part. Now it's time for you to do yours." This was the beginning of a lengthy instruction and plea to her audience - followed by the collection plate. Did she properly balance "Freely give" with "A worker is worthy of his food"?

The responsibility of those being ministered to is to share what they have with the minister. The responsibility of the minister is to give without charge. It really isn't complicated. Disobedience of one is not grounds for disobedience of another.

Matthew 10:7,8: *"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."*

True servants of Christ are obedient to Christ. They give "freely". Freely means without charge or pay. Those considering themselves "called into the ministry" (we are all called) should be examples of faithfulness to the One they claim has called them. The otherwise is flaky.

Paul taught, "Those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." And, "Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock but does not drink of the milk of the flock?" And, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain."

There is nothing in Paul's words suggesting a demand from the preacher for services rendered. His words do not validate a salary or wage. Let's bounce back into the Old Testament and check out that familiar encounter between Elisha and Naaman the leper….

"Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria" sought out Elisha for the purpose of getting healed of leprosy. Elisha complied, instructing the leper to "go and wash in the Jordan seven times."

Naaman was healed and Naaman was grateful and Naaman offered Elisha a gift - not an insignificant gift, but great wealth which the NLT describes as, "750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing."

Preachers take note: Elisha was a preacher. Elisha's response should matter much to every preacher and every person wanting to know God's perspective on the matter of selling spiritual services. Is Elisha not a notable hero of the faith, "a man of God", "a prophet in Israel"? Elisha's response….

2 Kings 5:16: *But he said, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.*

Hmmm. The "man of God" refused payment. *Hmmm.* 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold. *Hmmm.* Lots of clothes.

God could have instructed Elisha to charge *something* - like maybe just one gold coin, or a pair of sandals - just so preachers could have a precedent. But no, there does not seem to be one instance in the Old Testament whereby someone sold God's precious truths or one's ministration.

Now back to Paul….

1 Corinthians 9:15 (NLT): *I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge.*

Obviously, Paul was supported on his missionary trips, etcetera. But he didn't charge for services rendered. God provided through whosoever.

Paul could have had a comfortable, even wealthy, life. ("If possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.") But no, he worked with his hands rather than be a hindrance to the gospel, this to his eternal benefit; riches gained from his christian ministry would have been accomplished at the expense of rewards in heaven.

And everyone knows the greatest preacher ever, our Lord Jesus, though He was supported by "many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him", never charged for all the good He did. Doesn't Jesus' invitation to "Follow Me" suggest we are to follow His example? Can we really follow Him who said "Freely give" while charging for services rendered?

T H E S I S # 69

Neither decades of observance nor endorsement of most validate non-Biblical practices. It was monetary abuse that prompted Martin Luther's "95 Theses".

Few have given serious consideration to the power of *the way it is*. The status quo within evangelicalism surpasses the Bible as the evangelical's guide and authority, though this no evangelical would admit or even realize. How else could non-Biblical practices have survived so many decades and centuries?

Selling spiritual wares and services is done, and because it is so done and has been done for so many years and continues to be done by the renown and respected, it is a thoroughly entrenched okay. No need for New Testament precedent. The words of Lord Jesus ("Freely give") are trumped by custom birthed many years ago by unbelieving believers needful of an alternate way to finance their religious ambitions. These pygmies of the faith would be amazed at the gigantic industry their compromise has evolved into.

"The just shall live by faith." Faith is God's method for getting the job done. However, insufficient faith in Christ necessitates another way, something more practical than trust in God. Practicality, not faith, rules the evangelical way.

Martin Luther was a son of catholic practicality. Practicality ushered in the papacy and a suitable city of residence for popes. The selling of indulgences (an indulgence being a plan of escape from purgatory - purgatory being a fiery place of punishment and purification in preparation for heaven) helped finance the palaces of the pope's resident city and other complexities of catholicism. This merchandising sparked Luther's "95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" which, in turn, sparked the reformation.

Evangelical builders and controllers have their own plan for financing their own spiritual behemoth.... the tithe. The tithe is productive practicality, having been used to help build and maintain buildings in every city in North America and most cities throughout the world. As indulgences helped the

catholic escape purgatory, the tithe keeps the evangelical from being “cursed with a curse” from the very God who to them “gave His only begotten Son”.

T H E S I S # 70

Jesus, the twelve, Paul, and many others are ample proof selling is not required to fulfill one’s calling. There is no Bible precedent for selling spiritual truths.

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(See note # 1.) **An imaginary letter to Paul the apostle approximately two millennia ago:**

Paul of Tarsus:

The intent of this letter is to propose a more efficient way to advance the gospel, which I understand to be the burden of your heart.

While I appreciate your gallant effort to repair tents to help finance your travels, I suggest we contract an alliance whereby I inject my business skills to enhance the success of your ministry.

Your letters are well read by christians throughout the Roman Empire, and your reputation as an apostle, endorsed by colleagues in Jerusalem and further endorsed by signs and wonders, has opened a lucrative door of opportunity. This is my proposal:

1. I will hire copyists in five key locations within the empire to produce an extensive supply of copies of your letters to be sent to numerous locations.
2. I will hire travelling agents to offer our products at house churches and various places of sale. Agents will be paid by commission.
3. The price of each duplicate will be determined by market demand, expenses incurred, your salary sufficient to cover travel and provisions, and a reasonable profit for myself.

I encourage you to take advantage of your flourishing credibility by producing more writings, from

short articles to extended manuscripts. I can supply rewriters and proofreaders to increase production.

From a business perspective, it is imperative we saturate the market quickly. When others of influence, e.g. the original apostles, realize the potential profit from marketing the gospel and their teachings, they undoubtedly will simulate our strategy.

This is a win-win opportunity. Your influence over the minds and hearts of christians will greatly increase. You will be able to travel with speed and safety (and comfort) to areas thus far unreachable. And this venture will inject needed commerce into local christian communities.

I envision the coupling of your anointing and my expertise will result in the furtherance of the gospel you so dearly love.

Your brother in Christ,

Marcus of Antipratis

(See note # 2.) **An imaginary response from Paul the apostle to an imaginary letter sent approximately two millennia ago** (read previous article)**:**

Marcus of Antipratis:

Thank you for your letter inviting me to participate in your business strategy. My reply is an emphatic "no".

My precious brother, the truths of God are not to be marketed alongside fish and cattle and spices. Believers are not to be charged for Christ's spiritual goods. The Father *gave* His Son and His Son *gave* His life. Christ was our example when He walked among us, and Our Example did not sell.

Can't you see how your trust in business and profit has corrupted your perspective?

Would you approach the mother of Jesus with your business plan, suggesting she testify of her miraculous impregnation and her life with the Holy One? Surely her testimony would be more lucrative than my letters.

Do you really think Peter would accept a salary to feed the Lord's lambs? Or John would market the keen insights received from the Holy Spirit? Or the others would record for gain the many adventures with their Master? Can you really visualize the noble centurion profiting from his servant's healing?

On two occasions the twelve witnessed Jesus thoroughly enraged by the money-changers in the temple and the religious leaders who profited from their wicked expertise. And all twelve heard the Lord Jesus plainly instruct, "Freely you have received, freely give."

Honest business is honorable. But business often becomes an idol, something more attractive than Christ. I encourage you to be a part-time businessman, not a part-time disciple. Busy yourself laying up treasures in heaven. Do not be enticed by what our High Priest called "the deceitfulness of riches".

Ministry can never be lord. Compromise, always a temptation, brings dreadful consequences…. always. Should generations after us stagger in unbelief and compromise, let it not be because of our immoral precedent. He commanded "freely give", "freely give" is easily understood, "freely give" is what we must do.

Paul of Tarsus

Note # 1: This is taken from a series of articles, *333* Words…. *Exactly*. (www.333words.org)

Note # 2: Same as # 1.

T H E S I S # 71

Solomon: The generous soul shall be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. (Pr.11:25) Since God replenishes, it costs nothing to give. It costs nothing to give little, and it costs nothing to give much.

If generosity makes a man rich, what does stinginess make him?

For many (most?) of us, giving is painful. And because it's so painful we steer away from it, this to our own injury.

One antidote to pain caused by giving is giving. Giving gets easier with practice.

Giving presses us into Lord Jesus, which results in increased faith, which results in giving made easier, which results in a better life here and hereafter.

"The just shall live by faith." We don't understand faith. We assume we have sufficient faith for a quick recovery from sickness, and don't understand why healing is so slow. If we don't have faith for generosity, believing God to replenish, why should we expect to have faith for the miraculous?

Yet we do have faith; what we want is more. And we do give; we want to be more generous. Giving can be fun; it gives us a pleasant tickle in our belly.

Feeding sunday's hungry collection basket isn't giving, but rather payment for service rendered. The 'good Samaritan' gave. The "poor widow" who "threw in two mites" was generous, and caught the Master's attention. Paul shared his earnings from labor with "those who were with me."

What did it cost the Samaritan to pay for expenses incurred? According to Solomon, nothing. And what did the "two mites" cost the widow? According to Solomon, nothing. And what did Paul's generosity cost Paul? According to Solomon, nothing.

And what will generosity cost us? Nothing. We may get recompensed down here or up there (probably both), but restitution is certain. And not just restitution, but restitution *plus* (that's a *big fat* plus).

A young man foolishly lost his house and incurred debt, bringing hardship to his family. He wrote in his Bible, "I will give myself out of debt." He gave himself out of debt and back into a house of their own.

Another antidote for pain caused by giving is gazing.

Have you noticed christians, generally speaking, don't change much? The controller, after a decade or two, is still encumbered by the need to control. Angry is still angry, Fearful is still fearful, Crippled is still crippled, Talkative is still talkative, Braggart still brags, Timid is still timid.

And Cheap is still cheap.

We don't change much because we don't gaze much.

Cheap won't get far, at least not near as far as he would if he were not so stingy. Much good works will not be accomplished because of his crippling unbelief.

Gazing upon the Lord Jesus Christ with a steady, or at least a frequent, gaze is the answer to every problem man has invented. Pursuing Christ religiously is not religion; it is wisdom. Our eternal future will be determined by our quality of gazing.

T H E S I S # 72

With God motive is everything. Though we receive by giving, receiving should not be our motive for giving.

Nobody's motive is pure because nobody's heart is pure.

"The Shepherd and Overseer of souls" is always taking His sheep from here to there, there being a loftier place of wholesomeness and integrity. On our upward climb, motives improve. When *there* becomes the *new here*, our journey in Christ continues, and together we head for a *new there*. *There* is never perfection, only improvement.

Though some will reach higher heights than others, none will reach perfection, not this side of death, so we might as well accept our imperfection of every good thing, including motives.

It's continuous improvement we seek.

Having said all that, our Lord fumes at hypocrisy - pretending to be what we are not, feigning a noble motive while impelled by a lesser.

Within evangelicalism is a religion that resembles a perverse business plan, a scheme assuring wealth for those of sufficient faith. This religion spills over and affects other corners of evangelicalism. This scheme of attaining wealth through giving requires hypocrisy - pretending generosity, but motivated by a promised handsome return. This crafty manipulating of God's Bible appeals to lovers of things, and many of these lovers have been seriously self-inflicted, spiritually and financially.

The strategy doesn't work because it is not endorsed or piloted by the Lord Jesus. ("Without Me you can do nothing.") And yet many mischievous merchants of the give-to-get plan have gained impressive wealth, using their pulpits to pry money from their naïve audiences and into their

'ministry'. These vendors, of the ilk of the temple moneychangers, defend their wealth by pointing to such OT wealthy characters as Abraham and Solomon, and incite their discouraged donators to tenaciously continue their faith-seeding.

It is good to give, and it is good to expect a return. Yet quality of motive determines quality of fruit. The best motive is simple obedience to the One we call *Lord.*

Giving money is spending the amount of life it has taken to earn that money. If Jesus is Lord of our lives in truth rather than symbolically we will consult Him, how much to give and where to direct our giving.

T H E S I S # 73

The old covenant method of financing God's work was the tithe. The new covenant method of financing the Lord's work, how much to give and where to direct one's giving, is submitting to the lordship of the Holy Spirit. There is no New Testament example of a christian tithing or being admonished to tithe.

It is advantageous to be well informed regarding God's dictates to the children of Israel regarding the tithe, and for what purposes. The reason the practice of tithing has survived centuries of church history is simply because believers failed to check out the OT for themselves. Perhaps evangelicals (etcetera) think a personal study is unnecessary, such is their trust in the officers of *the way it is*.

It is right to know. ("I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren.") If *any* christian should be informed of church affairs, *every* christian should be informed. And tithing is a most important church concern, one that affects millions of saved and billions of unsaved. This subject is most worthy of your investigation.

Simply check a concordance for a list of the words, *tithe*, *tithes*, *tithing*, and *tenth* and see where it takes you.

But first, try to define the evangelical definition of tithe, and its considered purpose. And then compare this to your findings regarding your God's instructions to the "children of Israel", and His purposes. If, in your personal study of Scripture, you discover no similarity, you have every reason to

be thoroughly ticked.

Your definition of the evangelical tithe might look like this….

Everyone in the local church is to tithe his/her income. None are exempt, rich or poor. Tithes should be given weekly or monthly, as income is earned. Tithes should be given to one's local church, considered to be the tither's "storehouse". Church expenses, including the pastor's salary, are financed, partially or mostly, by tithes. Those neglecting to tithe faithfully are robbing God and "cursed with a curse".

Now the OT tithe. Perhaps your conclusions, after a study, would be….

Not everyone tithed. Abraham did not tithe his possessions or increase. Fishermen did not tithe their catch. Carpenters did not tithe their income. No person tithed money. Only agriculturalists tithed, their harvest and livestock. Tithes from farms beyond the promised land boundaries were unacceptable. The message from Malachi so often quoted ("You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation") was addressed "to Israel", not those outside Israel, certainly not Christ's future church.

It is obvious to anyone receptive of truth that there's glaring differences between evangelicalism's tithe imposed upon the evangelical and God's tithe imposed upon the Israelite nation.

If the Lord wanted His *new covenant* children to tithe, would we not find such instructions in the New Testament? Wouldn't we find such an admonition in Christ's red letters? Or in the writings of Paul, Peter, James or John?

We say, "God is good…. all the time." And He most definitely is…. all the time. A good parent will make his instructions known and fully understood before punishing a child for disobedience. And our God is a very good parent.

T H E S I S # 74

Nonetheless, most evangelical churches teach their adherents to give ten percent of their

income to the local church. While there is serious disagreement among denominations on many issues, there is, suspiciously, very little disagreement on the issue of tithing.

For those who did make their own study on tithing, and found no similarity between God's tithe to the jews and the tithe of evangelicalism imposed upon evangelicals, you have inadvertently proved the entire (or almost entire) evangelical ministerial to be unqualified to give leadership to God's people.

I know, I know…. that wasn't your intention; you just wanted to check out their claims regarding the tithe. And yet you did expose either their lack of understanding or, worse yet, their collective dishonesty.

Think about it….

Could you trust the math teacher who teaches ten times ten equals ninety? Or the babysitter caught stealing change? Or scientists who believe we are descendants of the ape? Or the inspector known to accept bribes? No, they have proved to you their judgment and/or integrity cannot be trusted.

The young man went off to Bible school to obtain certification, this to convince you his understanding of Scripture is way above yours. He could never challenge such a key teaching as tithing - that would threaten his career. So he betrayed common sense and the loyalty we all have to truth. Eventually he became your pastor, but his loyalty to you has always been secondary to those who endorsed him. You are dispensable; they are not. He passed on to you the same whopper he swallowed as a student, betraying the trust you have in him and those he bows to.

What other conclusion is there? It is not possible nearly 100% of the ministerial could collectively agree God has made them the equivalent of the Levite priests, *and* God somehow and at some time made the local church His "storehouse", *and* God now wants His children ("heirs of God"!) to entrust ten percent of their income to other children, *and* He will curse "with a curse" those disobedient to this strange decree endorsed by no New Testament person.

Depositing unwarranted trust in man is making a withdrawal from our trust in our Lord Jesus. Our trust in Jesus is displayed by our faithfulness to the Bible every evangelical declares to be "given by inspiration of God".

T H E S I S # 75

Tithing is the only Old Testament regulation evangelicalism has adopted. Those most passionately defending the tithe are those relying on the tithe for a living.

Lord Jesus often asked: *Why?* For example….

Matthew 6:28: *"Why do you worry about clothing?"*

Worry is something we all do, and because we all do it we accept it as normal behavior, not asking why. We learned to worry as a child and got better at it with time and practice.

Why? is a penetrating question that takes courage to ask, stirring us to consider what we have avoided considering. *Why?* challenges the accepted in our own christianity. "Why am I doing what I am doing? Why am I following who I am following? Why am I supporting what I am supporting?"

By asking *Why?*, our Lord Jesus has taught us it's okay to ask. It's okay to question *the way it is* in our own lives. The *Why?* question reveals our motives.

Why? questions should be asked regarding our spending, because the money we spend represents the life we have invested earning it. Nobody (that's *nobody*) but the Holy Spirit should influence our spending, especially our giving.

Many want a say in what we do with our income – the builders and the controllers and the compromisers and the religiously ambitious. We have all been coerced to support weak and futile things. A righteous response could be: "No more! No more!"

As stated in Thesis # 73, "Tithing is a most important concern, one that affects millions of saved and billions of unsaved." Because many in the church of Jesus Christ insist you should tithe, the tithe issue should surely be subject to a series of blunt *Why?* questions, such as….

Why is the tithe the only *OT regulation brought over into the New Covenant?*

Why didn't they bring over, for example, sabbath (saturday) worship? The seventh-day adventists could give a much stronger argument for honoring saturday (rather than sunday) than any evangelical could argue for the tithe. Isn't one of the ten commandments, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"? (See note.) Why has the tithe been given special status?

Why is Malachi's "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse" given preeminence over 2 Corinthian's, "Let each one give as he purposes in his heart"?

One might reason since Malachi is in the OT and addressed "to Israel" and 2 Corinthians is in the NT and addressed to "the church of God which is at Corinth", the latter would be given more consideration.

Why does an Old Covenant directive trump the leading of the Holy Spirit in the amount I give and where I give?

A logical question. Lord Jesus said, "He will guide you into all truth." Doesn't "all truth" include our giving?

Why didn't the "apostles and elders" conclude at their gathering in Jerusalem (Acts, chapter 15) that the gentile converts were to tithe their income?

Another excellent question. Indeed it also "seemed good to the Holy Spirit" to not impose the tithe upon them (us).

Why does church leadership insist I give ten percent when the NT tells me to never give "in response to pressure" (NLT)?

The tithe is a command, a "pressure".

Why should I be "cursed with a curse" for not tithing, and not be "cursed with a curse" for neglecting many other OT regulations that every evangelical ignores?

Our God was reprimanding His chosen people for disobedience, which happened to involve the tithe. The same reprimand would have applied for disobedience against any other statute.

Why didn't Paul, who gave a number of instructions to various churches, instruct the churches to tithe?

Surely this was not an oversight. If all these gentile christians were to be "cursed with a curse" for neglecting to tithe, surely Paul would have given warning in his several letters.

Why should I expect Lord Jesus to richly reward me, at the judgment seat, for tithing to the church when most of that is for services rendered?

Lord Jesus taught, "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, *because they cannot repay you."* More of my givings would be directed to those who "cannot repay" (such as third world people desperate for the gospel) if such a big portion was not given to the local church.

Why are those paid a salary by the tithe the hardest to convince of the obvious?

It is not possible that the majority of pulpit people, if they prayerfully searched the Bible they proclaim to be the inspired word of God, could come to the conclusion it is the will of our Lord Jesus Christ for His people to tithe. No way. And yet few express outrage against the outrageous. On the contrary, most continue to be salaried by what any rational person would judge to be a sting .

It seems impossible to ponder these *Why?* questions and conclude anything other than purposeful blindness or outright chicanery.

Note: Romans 14:5: *One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let*

each be fully convinced in his own mind.

T H E S I S # 76

Since there is a strong argument against the practice of tithing, fair play requires that "It is time to collect the tithes" be changed to "It is time to collect the tithes from those who believe in tithing."

There's a captivating statue in Boys Town, founded in 1917 for homeless and abandoned boys, of a young man carrying a little boy piggyback. The caption reads, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother."

Siblings have a love and trust for each other that rise above that for others. This special bond is one of God's essentials for making a family a family.

Because trust goes deep, when it is betrayed the pain is acute. The scar from sibling betrayal could be lifetime, the damage irreparable.

In Christ's church we are true brothers and sisters, all adopted by God through His Son Jesus, all washed in the same Blood, our names written in the "Book of life", all headed for the same place. We have a trust for each other far beyond the trust we have for outsiders and the trust outsiders have for each other.

When that trust is betrayed, the pain is acute.

We don't break trust with each other when we serve the same Lord, when sensitive to the same Spirit. But when one trades lordship, disposing Christ from the throne of his life to seat another lord - this being quite common - there is strife and betrayal in His family.

Broken trust frequently occurs at collection time though, incredibly and perhaps thankfully, few seem to see it for what it is.

At conferences (and such) the one most successful in prying money from his brothers and sisters is often selected to take the offering. This person may have a crusty heart, willing to stretch and twist

and finagle *The Word* to make it compatible to their ambitions, the end justifying the means.

At one conference, the story goes, the audience was asked to remove all change from their pockets. And then they were instructed to throw all their change to the floor, a tip for the clean-up people. Everyone laughed as the coins hit the carpet. And then began the *real* collection - no change, just bills and checks. A *very* successful collection.

Christians can be creative, and their skills are often used to extract money from a suspicious and reluctant audience. Tears, jokes, stories, embellished needs, testimonies, reprimands, pleas, songs, promises, prophecies – all these (and combinations) have been expertly used to fleece the sheep and fatten the collection. Have you noticed collection always comes immediately after praise and worship? Best time to hit them is when their hearts have been sufficiently softened.

All these tactics are evidence of unbelief, perhaps sprouting from doubts that God is supportive of their conference (and such), or from lack of trust in His power and willingness to supply their needs.

"The just shall live by faith." Collections are Scriptural, but they must be taken by faith, not connivance. The need should be presented candidly, no coercing. Collection time is no time to forget we are ambassadors of Christ, and Him alone do we serve. Compromise compromises the christian gathering, having a draining effect of God's blessings, the same negative effect it has on the compromising individual.

When the local church declares, "It is time to collect the tithes", it is being unfair. It's implying that tithing is an established fact, when, in fact, it has always been debatable. It's suggesting everyone present believes in tithing, though many of the pew people have serious reservations. Those reservations should be honored.

Why doesn't the local church have a debate, tithers versus non-tithers? What a great way to aerate this most important issue.

Evangelical, why not make such a suggestion to the pastor? (Joke.)

T H E S I S # 77

The burden of church building maintenance and leadership salaries pass from one generation to another to another. Many, perhaps most, church buildings and salaries are maintained by money intended to finance the great commission – to reach the nations for Christ.

_____

(See note.) A wealthy landlord receives news that his homeland people had been stricken by a deadly epidemic. Fortunately, he has in his possession the antibiotic to combat this ravenous disease. He immediately sends a number of his servants to their rescue, and entrusts to his servants a large sum of money to meet the expenses they will surely incur.

The servants love their good and generous master. And they know the antibiotic is powerful to save the sick and dying because they themselves have once been cured from the same disease by the same medicine. And so with much fervor and compassion in their hearts they set out for the master's homeland.

When at last they arrive at their destination they discover that the awful reports of the condition of these people were not exaggerated. Oh, what a pitiful sight! Multitudes of people – helpless, hurting, confused, dying in their sickness.

The servants decide among themselves that before they begin the enormous task of ministering to the sick, they should establish a camp for themselves. After setting up camp, they elect a leader, a man with a shepherd-like heart who will care for them and give direction. The leader shoulders the responsibility of caring for the stewards and proposes a permanent headquarters be constructed, a place where they can rest periodically from the difficult task they will soon be encountering, a place where they can come together and encourage one another. Some are very enthused with this proposal, and some object. After some debate a vote is taken and a building committee formed.

The building committee embraces the challenge with enthusiasm, and designs an edifice that will not only satisfy their needs, but also give glory to their good and generous master. The passion burning in the servants' hearts for the landlord's commission is now temporarily diverted into an enthusiasm for the building project. At the urging of the gifted and determined leader everyone gets

involved. Soon the foundation is laid and, brick by brick, the headquarters complex begins to take shape.

Unhampered, the epidemic rages. The increasingly pitiful cries of the helpless people can occasionally be heard over the clamor of all the building activities, so much so that some of the stewards lay down their tools and bring some of the precious medicine from the stock to give to them. They also take a portion of the master's money to purchase bandages and blankets and other medical equipment. The leader is alarmed, fearing everyone will abandon the building project. He admonishes the mutinous stewards, pointing out their action is causing division. He calls an emergency meeting and makes an impassioned plea for unity and commitment to the group. Many of the dissident stewards repent of their rash behavior, and almost everyone pledges commitment to the group and to leadership. Some, a few, resist peer pressure and continue to minister to the masses.

After some time the complex is finished. It is indeed a fine edifice. The stewards have proven themselves to be master builders. The project, however, ran over the estimate, as building projects often do, and the master's money is depleted. A message is sent back to the master requesting more funds. The master agrees to allocate a certain amount of money to the stewards every month. The leader forms a committee and they immediately draw up a monthly budget.

It has already been decided the competent leader should be given a salary. And he will certainly require a secretary. And an office and stationary. The new building requires chairs, comfortable chairs for the stewards who will soon begin the arduous task of ministering to the sick. The grounds around the complex are in dire need of landscaping. And there is need of musical instruments to give inspiration to their weekly meetings. And then there is money needed for taxes. And maintenance. And…

Well the master's monthly allocation is simply not enough to meet the budget and supply these immediate needs. The stewards approach the moneylenders who gladly respond to their plight for a mere ten percent interest.

At least twice a week the leader dispenses a dosage of medicine to each in his flock so there will be no chance anyone will contract the terrible disease growing more rampant with every passing day. By now most of the stewards' hearts have become crusty toward the master's commission. They

become more demanding and selfish. Their ears become deaf to the sick and dying just outside the headquarters walls. Dress and fashion become more and more relevant. They involve themselves in social functions which had the effect of fortifying the commitment each had made to the group.

Word got back to the landlord that very little of his precious medicine has been given to the sick. The landlord was deeply troubled. His beloved homeland people are dying needlessly, and the stewards he trusted have proven themselves unfaithful. He writes a letter and sends it to his unreliable stewards.

My dearest children,

I want to express the undying love I have for each of you. Without hesitation I would lay down my life for you, and I gladly share all that is mine to meet your every need.

I am, however, distressed beyond measure and beyond description at the evil reports I have recently received about the way you have squandered my money. This money was not meant to build buildings or to comfort yourselves. It was meant to meet only your immediate needs and the needs of the sick and dying people. I had instructed you to minister my precious medicine to these people, but you have kept it to yourselves even though there is enough for everyone. I expected you to lay down your life for this cause but instead you have sought your own comfort, and misappropriated my funds. You have turned my money into blood money.

Because I love you with an undying love, I chasten you and call you to repentance. Give up your dead works. Complete the task I have given you. Be filled again with compassion for the hurt and dying people.

Remember, one day I will call each of you back to give an account. Each of you will be rewarded on the basis of what you have done and did not do. And remember my words I have given you, "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

Your loving master.

Some stewards weep grievously at their beloved master's words. How could they have been so blind? They turn from their selfishness and go out to minister love and compassion to the sick and dying people, bringing them the precious medicine and passing on to them almost every penny of their share of the master's money, keeping for themselves only enough to meet their most essential needs. Others are indignant against their master's words, and harden their hearts against them. Had they not built this edifice to the master's glory? How can he be so insensitive to their zealous endeavors? They refuse to abandon their programs and social activities, convinced he simply did not mean what he said. And they continue to grow in self-centeredness, blind to the fact that one day they must give an account.

Note: This is an excerpt from *Financing the Great Commission* (available at www.larryjones.ca).

T H E S I S # 78

A house church is a practical alternative to the evangelical institutional church.

Why do I do what I do?

A most important and probing question. Hopefully your response is: *I do what I do because what I do enhances the relationship between Lord Jesus and me.*

There are many reasons why you might attach yourself to a house church. Perhaps you can, or will soon be able to say….

I attach myself to a house church in the hopes of strengthening and nourishing my relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 15:4: *"Abide in Me."*

These three words should be before us always. “Abide in Me, and I in you” is Christ’s *Great Invitation* to His own, spoken to the twelve shortly before His exit from planet earth. Though He is in New Jerusalem sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is with us. He is present. He wants to enter deeper into who we are, and can only do so if we embrace more fully who He is.

There are degrees of abiding. We all abide in Christ, but some have a more wholesome relationship with Jesus than others. For everyone, improvement is quite possible.

While perusing this section of this book, *An Alternative*, it is suggested you keep Christ’s three words, “Abide in Me”, in mind and heart, to not let another motive for house church sneak in. You do not want to waste more time, as time gets scarcer with every passing day. Time pursuing something or someone other than Lord Jesus is time wasted.

There is a viable alternative to evangelicalism, and it would be wise to explore this alternative. Let’s look at our choices….

One choice of fellowship, chosen by most, is the institutional church.

Institutional churches make institutionalized christians. An institutionalized christian does not know she is institutionalized. She needs to be preached to (thus *95 Theses,* thus *Another 95*, thus many fine writings on this subject from those having found a better way). Hopefully by now you can clearly see evangelicalism is something to outgrow (escape from?) although it is not without benefits.

The beckoning call of evangelicalism is the same as Christ’s: *Abide in us, and we in you.* Proof of this harmful abiding relationship is obedience. To know one’s lord, simply observe to whom one bows.

When scrutinized by *The Word* the IC is found wanting; the two-tier system is harmful and non-Bible. Your escape is not necessarily to be today, but today might be a good time to pray for and plan your freedom.

A second choice of fellowship is a house church.

A house church (that is, a *quality* house church), when given equal scrutiny, is *not* found wanting. It is one-tier, it is Biblical, it is relational, it is natural, it bears fruit, and, most important, it enhances one's relationship with Christ.

While considering house churches, special consideration should be given to the only verse that clearly indicates how a gathering should function….

1 Corinthians 14:26 (NLT): *Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.*

Everyone participates. Everyone is a preacher and everyone is an audience. Gatherings were intended to be a time of "one another" ministry. (The term "one another" in reference to reciprocal ministry is mentioned several times in the writings of the apostles.)

There are various names for house churches, such as *small church, simple church, home church, relational church, Biblical church,* etcetera. But we will just stay with *house church*, though the term is a misnomer (church is christians, not a building). Perhaps a satisfactory definition for a house church is: *a self-governed gathering of christians, in a home, at regular intervals, whereby opportunity to express (as the Holy Spirit so directs) is equal to all.*

House church is not a new concept; christians had been meeting in homes centuries before evangelicalism and most other religions were invented. There are thousands of house churches throughout North America, but they are most numerous in oppressive countries such as China and Russia and Cuba where christianity has been forced underground.

The one who attaches oneself to a HC will have a radically different outcome than the one depositing oneself into an IC. May the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace to choose wisely. Amen?

T H E S I S # 79

A house church is not a cell group (which is an appendage of an evangelical church), not a Bible

study, not a prayer meeting. A house church is (or should be) a gathering unto Jesus Christ.

Not a cell group….

There is very little a cell group and a house church have in common, other than both meet in homes. A cell group is governed and influenced by an evangelical church. The denominational rep, perhaps a trusted 'layman', relays an approved program to the small group. This is so very opposite to being spontaneously led by the Holy Spirit.

Some denominations are now planting networks of house churches. There is every reason to be suspicious. The two-tier system is still in effect, only less obvious. The 'reverend' leaves his title behind, and picks it up again when attending his church sunday morning. His heart and loyalty are firmly fixed upon denominational lords, this a major hindrance to being an agent of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps such a denominational HC is somewhere between a real HC and a cell group.

Not a Bible study….

(See note.) In our quest for spiritual gain, doctrine should never trump relationship…. that is to say, one's determination to know truth should be less than knowing *the* Truth, including truth about the Truth…. or said another way, being doctrinally sound is good but being relationally sound is better, much better.

For most evangelicals (etcetera), there was a dismal moment when *He* was discarded for an *it*. Our very first days in Christ were full of the wonder of *Him*. For many, it didn't take long for evangelicalism (or whatever) to turn one's focus from *Him* to one of many *its*, one of the *its* being evangelicalism itself, and another being an inordinate (disproportionate, irrational) need to be doctrinally correct.

(Are you experiencing meager fruit? A skewed loyalty is the reason. If you don't expel your *it* and reinstate *Him* on life's throne, meager will continue to be normal and approaching judgment day will be an embarrassment.)

Doctrine police often cite Ac17:11 which speaks of the "noble" Thessalonicans who "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" to rationalize their obsession to be doctrinally flawless. However, those townspeople "searched the scriptures" to determine if the Nazarene was indeed the promised Christ, not to intensely defend/decimate doctrines such as eternal security, the reality of hell-fire, end-time prophecies, and many etceteras.

1Cor8:1: "Knowledge puffs up." Knowledge puffs the professor, the plumber, the poet, the prosperous and the poor. And misaligned christians. The itch to know for the sake of knowing is less than virtuous. Only the ego is enriched.

The religious love to expound their stuff to the less informed. Not so the fervent.

Knowledge actually comes more readily to those not obsessed with it, those occupied with Jesus. That's because more of Christ equals more of "the Spirit of Christ" who "will guide you into all truth".

Ps119:11: "Your word have I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You."

A pure motive for learning is to serve Him rightly.

Not a prayer meeting....

This is not petition time, at least not primarily. Prayer, however, is a crucial ingredient to a successful house church. The more prayer, the more fruit. The less prayer, the less fruit.

But a gathering unto Jesus Christ....

What does it mean to gather unto Jesus?

Ten people gather at Merf's house to watch a football game. They are not gathering unto Merf, just gathering. A week later old Merf has a birthday party and invites the same ten to celebrate his fiftieth. Unlike last week, this time the ten are *gathering unto* Merf.

They talk about Merf, they celebrate Merf, they kid Merf, they pray for Merf. It's Merf, Merf, Merf. He sits at the head of the dinner table, they toast him and present him with a real nice gift. Same house, same ten, same Merf. But this time it's a *gathering unto* a person, not just getting together.

Gathering unto Lord Jesus is an attitude, a proper mindset. HC people are (hopefully) cognizant they are honoring their King and their God and their Creator. This might prompt a holy hush, speaking softly and carefully as if He were in the room.

Which He is.

Note: This is taken from a series of articles, *333* Words.... *Exactly*. (www.333words.org)

T H E S I S # 80

The principles that make an individual christian spiritually healthy and prosperous are the same principles that make a house church healthy and prosperous. God's ways do not change when one becomes two, when two becomes three, when three becomes a dozen.

(See note.) To know what works for a group, determine what works for you the individual.

For a house church to be successful the group must regulate themselves in the same manner an individual is to regulate him/herself. This is simple and this is important and this is the topic of this article.

The answer to "How should *we* do this?" is the same as "How should *I* do this?" The answer to "What does the Lord want *us* to do?" is probably the same as "What does the Lord want *me* to do?" An example….

Some have an aversion to organization, perhaps a backlash against the OC (organized church). *Should the house church adopt this same attitude?* The answer is the same for *us* as it is for *me*. God is immutable. Holiness doesn't allow a double standard. Wisdom doesn't have opposing solutions. All are called to build on the words of our Christ. God's ways do not change when one becomes two, when two becomes three, when three becomes a multitude. Because He changes not, neither do we.

Should you the individual be disorganized? Of course not. Therefore, applying the above logic, a group of individuals should not be disorganized. The OC did not invent organization. The opposite of organized is disorganized. God seems to be a very organized person. It's hard to think of Jesus being disorganized. Perhaps organization isn't so bad after all. Organization should not be a god to be served but an instrument to utilize. The goal is to tap into the order of the Holy Spirit. Lord, should we meet at seven or eight? Tuesdays or Sundays? Here or there?

Another question: *Should we, as a group, be casual and spontaneous?* The answer is the same as the answer to the question, *Should* I *be casual and spontaneous, go wherever, do whatever, whenever?* We take the *me* answer and apply it to *us*.

Jesus was not casual. And Jesus certainly was not frivolous. He set His face like a flint. He had a cup to drink, a course to complete, a job to do. The individual is His disciple, serious because He is, focused because He is, determined because He is. 'My' calling is to pursue Christ, my passion pleases Him. Likewise *we* are His disciples, *we* are to be focused, and *our* passion pleases Him. A

group cannot gather unto Christ casually; we can only be casual when He is far from our thoughts, more infatuated with each other than with Him. Save casual for heaven. We live in a war zone. Planet earth needs earnest warriors.

One more: What makes a house church successful? Only a healthy attachment to the Vine makes the christian healthy, and only a healthy attachment to the Vine will make a house church healthy.

C h a l l e n g e : *Is Jesus lord in fact or lord symbolically? Submitting to the leadership of the Holy Spirit is submitting to the lordship of Jesus in fact.*

P r a y e r : *Father, may we be good for each other. May we each be warmed by the glow of our love for Your Son. Father, anoint these words.* (And hopefully the reader responds, "Amen!")

This formula (what works for *me* works for *us*) really is a proficient means of determining what works well for a HC gathering. Another example….

Prayer. I can better realize the importance of prayer for the well-being of any HC by comprehending my own need for prayer. I can have a better life by praying for a better life. I can have more eternal treasures in heaven by making that a serious, ongoing request. Didn't our Lord Jesus say, "Ask, and you will receive"?

As *I* have an enemy, *we* have an enemy. The guy that wants "to kill, and to destroy" me also wants "to kill, and to destroy" any HC fervently gathering unto our Christ. Prayer helps protect *me* and *us*.

The HC wanting more of the Holy Spirit should pray for it. Want to be protected from false teachings? …. pray for protection. Want more good fruit? …. pray for more fruit. Want your praise and

worship to be more meaningful? …. "Ask, and you will receive."

One more example, the elder question….

Should the HC have elders, and if so what is their role? The answer is the same answer to the question every believer should ask oneself, "Should *I* have an elder in *my* life, and if so what should be his/her role?"

You probably *do* have elders in your life, but not titled as such. (Perhaps you are an elder to others.) You want the elder to lead you by example, and not be invasive. Someone has well said the role of an elder is advisory, not executive. No one should obstruct the sovereignty of God over you. The relationship with an elder should be reciprocal, not one way; even though the elder has been around longer, he/she can also learn from you. Certainly you do not want the elders in your life to have occasional closed meetings to decide how to direct your life.

Now transport that same logic to your HC. Within the group there are elders, though they may not be titled. (Perhaps you are an elder.) You want the elders to lead by example, and not be invasive. The role of an elder is advisory, not executive. No one should obstruct the sovereignty of God over the HC. The relationship with elders should be reciprocal, not one way; you learn from them, they learn from you. Certainly you do not want elders in the HC to have occasional closed meetings to decide how to direct the meetings, etcetera.

Most church splits are from the top down, not the bottom up. To avoid division (not all division is bad) the HC should not have even a whiff of ecclesiasticism – no top, no bottom. Elders given an official position of leadership could well compete with each other for top influence, thus grieving the Holy Spirit, thus compromising the entire HC.

These are but a few of many critical issues every HC can face. Can you think of an instance whereby this principle (what works for *me* works for *us*) will not work?

Note: This article is taken from a series of articles, So You Want to Start a House Church (available at www.larryjones.ca).

T H E S I S # 81

As the sole agenda of the individual should be to enrich his/her relationship with Christ, the sole agenda of the group should be to enrich their relationship with Christ.

This is not a trifling matter. If pursuing Christ is not the determined and proclaimed goal of the HC a lesser agenda will be nursed. Keep in mind christianity's major flaw and detriment is an impoverished affiliation with Christ. No christian is Christ-less (relationally speaking), but most christians are Christ-impoverished (relationally speaking). It isn't easy to remain vitally attached to *The Vine* while being part of a christianity that isn't.

Before me is a very good life. Before the house church is a very good life. This spiritually rewarding life may never be captured, but it's there. Few find it, but it's there. Only those wanting it sufficiently will enter, this with jubilation. To get it, I must see it and want it and know it is attainable.

To get it, the HC must see it and want it and know it is attainable.

The best thing the HC can do is influence each other to long for this higher life in Jesus. This is a most holy and worthwhile agenda. No other objective will bear such an abundance of good fruit.

We make each other thirsty for more of Christ by preaching Christ to each other. By simply talking about Him. By publicly expressing gratitude. By quoting those words in red. By declaring His rightful lordship over our lives.

By bowing before Him in humble earnestness. By loving Him. By wanting Him sufficiently. By expressing His greatness. By prospecting His character. By singing praises unto Him. By reminding each other He is here.

By fiercely guarding His lordship over the group. By reminding each other we are His sent ones. By praying to Him. By symbolically eating His body and drinking His blood in memory of Him.

By expressing appreciation for Calvary. By lingering at the cross. By a collective holy hush when He manifests His presence. By giving Him permission to woo us deeper into who He is by His precious

Holy Spirit.

By obedience. By enthusiasm. By preaching to each other "Jesus Christ and Him crucified".

This holy endeavor of a HC should be clearly stated. Visitors should know, "Here, we magnify the Lord. Here, we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Here, we await the Lord Jesus to manifest Himself."

Christians, whom we can see and touch and hear, cannot be esteemed above Christ, whom we cannot see and touch and hear. It's not about me, it's not about us, it's about Him. "The first and great commandment" is to love God, not each other.

Getting along cannot trump getting Christ. Unity is a fruit of Christ-centeredness, but only with the Christ-centered. Fellowship with each other must be secondary to "fellowship of the Spirit".

As every good thing will abound to the one who abides in the love of Christ, every good thing will abound to the group that collectively abides in His love. For 'me', greatness (in Christ) is attainable. For 'us' greatness (in Christ) is attainable.

T H E S I S # 82

As the individual must surrender to the governorship of the Holy Spirit to relationally gain Christ, so the group must surrender to the Holy Spirit to gain Christ.

The Holy Spirit loves Jesus, and the Holy Spirit loves us, and the Holy Spirit wants to strengthen and better our connection to Jesus. That is His chief endeavor, and He can only do so by our cooperation.

Self-rule (or man-rule) was leading us to hell. After embracing Christ, we agreed to abdicate self-rule for Christ-rule. Sadly, the church (that's *the* church) we joined is not Christ-ruled, and like others we returned to old ways, becoming the decision maker once more. The Holy Spirit, to most, is an influence, not governor.

Surrendering fully to the Holy Spirit is an accomplishment rarely reached. When Peter said to the

others, "I am going fishing" (returning to his old life) he was led by self, not by the Holy Spirit. And when the others said, "We are going with you" they were following man, not God. For Peter and for all of us, it is difficult to switch from self-ruled to Spirit-ruled.

Even reaching fifty percent surrender, half self-ruled (or man-ruled) and half Spirit-ruled, is a mark few reach, so it seems. Since childhood we were taught by example to be selfish and self-centered, to live for self and make decisions in line with our own betterment. Self-rule had become a hefty part of who we are and what we do. We choose our house, our employment, our schedule, our church, our spouse, our vehicle, our etceteras.

This bent towards self-rule has a formidable enemy – the Holy Spirit. He will never stop in His effort to bring us into subjection to our Christ, knowing this is the only path to "the fruit of the Spirit", the only path to a better life.

Our speech reveals, to those wanting to know, the lord of our lives. Those in bondage to self say, "I am going fishing." Those in bondage to man say, "We are going with you." Servants of Christ say, "I believe the Holy Spirit is leading me in thus and thus direction."

For the one determined to move from painful self-rule to rewarding Spirit-rule, a HC can be beneficial. And it can be dangerous. Only aligning yourself to a group endeavoring to be Spirit-ruled will positively influence you. A group with opposite values will affect you negatively.

Is it reasonable to assume if a Spirit-led christian is rare, a Spirit-led HC is also rare? Probably not. Those ditching the IC have, probably, already proven themselves subjective to the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, it is likely a high percentage of HCs have an agenda less noble than persistently pursuing Jesus Christ.

If we do not reinstate the Holy Spirit to His rightful place as governor of our lives, if He is an influence only, the judgment seat of Christ will be a most dreaded appointment.

As success (that's properly defined success) is guaranteed for the Spirit-led christian, so it is guaranteed for the Spirit-led HC.

T H E S I S # 83

A collective endeavor of the group to focus on Jesus and a determination to allow no man to usurp the governorship of the Holy Spirit will assure a favorable outcome.

Christianity is ultra-simple if we remove all the unnecessary and burdensome paraphernalia, the detrimental extras best described as religion.

Jesus said and says, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

There is no religion in *The Great Invitation* expressed various ways in red words. Coming to Christ isn't to be a visit, or even a series of visits. He calls His own into permanent togetherness, a mingling of hearts. We are invited to rest continually with the One always at rest, not just a sabbath rest but a continuous monday to sunday calmness.

This generous offer is, generally speaking, ignored. For the few seriously embracing it, rest in Christ, though never fully realized this side of the grave, will slowly overtake anxiety. Life will get continuously better.

A smart HC will say "Yes and amen!" to Christ's beckoning into permanent fellowship. They will help each other stay focused on *The Great Invitation* by preaching "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" to each other. They will submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit during their gatherings and be alert for the intentional and unintentional usurper. (Perhaps unintentional outnumbers intentional.) And this leads to pertinent questions…

Whose responsibility is it to protect the governorship of the Holy Spirit?

All but one in the HC share that responsibility – that One being the Holy Spirit Himself. A guest should never impose himself. If the Holy Spirit detects an agreement in the hearts of most to submit to the leadership of a man (an elder, a 'reverend', a whatever) He will certainly honor their collective free will.

Who would dare usurp the Holy Spirit?

If there is a controller in the HC gathering (and there is little chance there will not be at least one) he (she) will, if given opportunity, eventually (perhaps quickly) take control. From his perspective he is the most able to lead the group to where he believes the group should go. From his perspective he should take control before one less able does so. From his perspective he is simply protecting the sheep from doctrine inferior to his own.

Ex-pastors might simply assume leadership, and the rest accept his leadership as God-ordained. (It would be interesting to know the percentage of ex's that give leadership in HCs.) The person who lives in the home where the HC gathers could presume to have the right to direct. Elders might form an eldership whereby they become the decision makers and directors.

So what's the answer?

Someone must, with the consent of all, establish the HC in such a way that sole leadership falls upon the Holy Spirit (the Lord Jesus leads and directs and nurtures the HC through the Holy Spirit.) Some would call such a person a *church-planter*. Perhaps a more Bible-friendly term would be an *apostle*, though some shy from the mere mention of that word.

What is an apostle?

The Amplified Bible calls an apostle "a special messenger". The message is not special (there is only one message), but the apostle has a special anointing to bring Christ to others and establish a christian community of believers. Whether that is or isn't an accurate conjecture is of little importance. What may be necessary is that *someone*, someone particularly loyal to Lord Jesus, someone local or someone brought in, gets the HC on track.

What does "on track" look like?

A HC on track looks like this: Decisions are made collectively, all have equal opportunity to express,

no man or woman is in charge of the gathering, the focus is on Jesus Christ, and all submit to the governance of the Holy Spirit.

After this is established, that *someone* (call him what you will) retreats. The HC is now the collective responsibility of the HC. The outcome of the HC will be as fruitful as their collective commitment to Christ, their submission to the Holy Spirit, and the quality and quantity of invested prayer.

(Understand that such a person - church-planter, apostle, whatever you choose to call him - is only needed if needed. And one church-planter may disagree with another as to the best arrangement and direction for a HC. The continuing quality of the HC could be determined by this man's level of passion and faithfulness to Lord Jesus.)

Just how does a person establish such a HC?

A few simple rules, a little organization. The right amount of guidelines is the amount necessary; you don't want more than necessary and you don't want less. This will vary, one HC needing more framework than another. If a HC consists entirely of mature Spirit-led believers (this would be rare), very little organization is required.

You want to guard against the gathering becoming a conversation. Conversations can be exhilarating and beneficial, but a HC is to be more than that. You want to relay to each other messages from the Holy Spirit. You want the unfolding of the fivefold preaching ministries of Ephesians 4:11. Conversations (and "one another" prayer ministry, etcetera) can happen afterward, perhaps during or after a meal.

A pulpit (yes, a pulpit) could greatly enhance and protect a HC.

(See note.) A pulpit in a house church? Seems unlikely, out of place, unnecessary. And yet….

A pulpit, correctly governed and employed, can prevent the hc from sinking from a stimulating ten-string guitar into an aggravating (clink-clink-clink) one-string. *Hunh?* Let's look at it….

In the evangelical church, he who controls the pulpit is the powerbroker. One excessively influencing many is quite unhealthy. But just suppose….

Just suppose there was an *open* pulpit accessible to all equally. Anarchy, you say? Well, let's tweak that a bit….

Suppose there were a few rules determined *by all* that applied *to all,* such as a time limit for each person. *Great idea,* thou thinkest, *but sounds a bit cumbersome for most evangelical services.* Okay, good point, but what about….?

What about a pulpit in a hc gathering where numbers aren't a complication? Think about it. A pulpit accessible to all, let's say a group of ten. All ten have equal opportunity to express. No one speaks except from the pulpit. Yes, this will be awkward at first, but the advantages are numerous, like….

Like shared influence. Protection from ambitious controllers. No sibling rivalry for top status. Equal opportunity to use God-given gifts. Diversity of expression. Safety in numbers from faulty doctrines. And more….

Utilizing a pulpit would be excellent training for all ten. We learn by doing. Those jitters will eventually go. Who knows what doors of opportunity will open? And much more….

If the Holy Spirit, and not man, is the orchestrator, the orchestra being the ten, Christ will be magnified. Much fruit will come. Still not convinced? Consider the alternative, *no* pulpit….

A powerbroker *will* arise, undoubtedly a controller. The Holy Spirit will be less wanted. The other

nine will eventually resemble the fellow in the evangelical pew, insignificant, stunted, bored. *Instead of a stimulating ten-string guitar, the hc will sink to an aggravating (clink-clink-clink) one-string.* Only guy that will be happy is…

The controller…. with his need to lead, itch to influence, hankering to be heard.

A pulpit can be anything handy - a small desk, a filing cabinet, a music stand, whatever. Limiting the time one is allowed to utilize the pulpit, be it five or ten or whatever minutes, prevents a takeover by a controller. Those prone to talk too much (a high percentage of christians?) will not have opportunity to be unduly influential. And more….

Have you noticed every highly effective communicator in christendom occupies a pulpit? Pulpit ministry improves with practice as one progresses from frightened to less frightened to bearable to comfortable. Who knows what great and influential preachers the HC with a pulpit might produce?

Note: This is taken from a series of articles, *333* WORDS…. *Exactly* (www.333words.org).

T H E S I S # 84

A people truly gathered unto Christ can expect Christ to manifest His presence; an absence of His presence indicates an inferior motive for gathering.

Of all gatherings within evangelicalism (etcetera) this week likely very few are "truly gathered unto Christ".

Matthew 18:20 (NLT): *Where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.*

Matthew 18:20 (TAB): *Wherever two or three are gathered (drawn together as My followers) in (into) My name, there I AM in the midst of them.*

There are many reasons christians gather, perhaps many are the same societal reasons the secular world gathers. Some gather out of habit or religious duty or to hear a sermon. There is a certain excitement in converging with others; bigger the crowd, bigger the excitement. Some (most?) christians are afraid to *not* go to church sunday mornings. But these purposes have little value compared to gathering "as My followers".

A (quality) HC group is something of real value. They have a freedom not found in the IC. Each has opportunity to influence, to persuade, to teach. If that influence is directed in such a way as to persuade each other to simply gather unto Christ, and stay focused on Christ, those meetings will be powerful.

When our Lord says, "I am there among them" it is assumed He comes for a purpose. Something good happens when He shows up. We need healing, inner and outer. We require sanctification. We must have truth. We need to be made thirsty that we might drink. We need addictions to go and freedom to come. We want to be strengthened in our connection to Him. We need to "be filled with the Holy Spirit." All these things Lord Jesus wants to impart.

Yes, a HC group has real potential. Wisdom would suggest the HC is worthy of a major investment of prayer. The HC will not go further than its prayer support, and it will go as far as its prayer support.

(See note.) House churches range from dysfunctional and ineffective to quite beneficial.

If you don't comprehend the high calling of your personal christianity, you will not realize the high calling of a hc. Only those who get it will get it.

Regarding your life and your hc, you must, you must, you must get it! And you won't get it by looking

around, because they don't get it either.

A hc consisting of a small band that gets it will affect their city and affect their country and affect the nations.

Yes, nations are the prize for those who get it! Salvation of multitudes nearby and distant is but one reward of those who understand and truly embrace the high calling of God.

Paul got it: "To live is Christ."

Not, "To live is christianity." Not, "To live is church-ianity." Not, "To live is honorable behavior." Not, "To live is soul-winning." But….

"To live is Christ!"

"To live is Christ" is wrapping one's entirety around Jesus Christ. "To live is Christ" is to purposely and continuously set one's love and focus on Him.

Very few, that's *very* few, are prepared for the future "judgment seat of Christ" because very few can now say, "To live is Christ." Most live for something or someone else.

That's why billions will perish. Only those who love abundantly beget abundantly.

To get from where you are to a higher place ("To live is Christ.") is a difficult and lengthy journey. Gathering with equally determined believers will get you (and them) higher quicker.

A healthy hc is simply a group that gathers unto Jesus Christ…. *enthusiastically.*

The Bible records such an enthusiastic gathering unto Lord Jesus. At His triumphal entry into Jerusalem "sitting on an ass's colt" they spread branches and even garments before Him while

shouting heartfelt praises.

The hc that gathers with similar passion unto the Lord Jesus *will* evolve into a potent force that will rock the world. They will rock the world by simply becoming passionate for Him.

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Note: This is taken from a series of articles, *333* WORDS…. *Exactly*. (www.333words.org)

T H E S I S # 85

A house church should manage itself by consensus.

There is nothing wrong with starting over. Starting over could be the beginning of better things. If a HC is not satisfied with its results, major adjustments may be required.

On the other hand, if it's working don't fix it.

A small group (that is, a Bible-believing group) starting out (or one starting over) has decisions to make, and these decisions should only be made with the Holy Spirit. It's easier to get it right from the start than make adjustments later. Highest priority should be twofold: to focus on the person of Jesus Christ in the gatherings, and, secondly, to invite the Holy Spirit to officiate. These two priorities will assure a good outcome.

And there are several less significant, yet important, decisions to be made, like: when to gather? how often? where? pulpit or no pulpit? a meal or no meal? communion service? if so, how often?

And…. what time limit, if any, for individuals speaking? how to do praise ministry? when to collect the tithes and offerings? (Joke.)

Wisdom might suggest a full saturday or sunday be set aside for the purpose of coming to a quality,

prayerful agreement how the HC assemblage should be conducted, a full day to discern what the Spirit of the Lord is saying. You don't want to be guided by reason and logic only, or even primarily. You want the mind of the Lord, for it is Him alone you do serve.

When?

It seems that few HCs meet at the most logical time – sunday mornings. This has to be more than coincidental. Consider: Morning is the most refreshing time of the day (the evening the least), and sundays are when most are able to attend. Sundays are often family times, and gathering as a family with other families is good. So why don't more HCs meet sunday mornings?

Could it be the HC doesn't want to compete with the IC? It should be just the opposite – the HC *wants* to compete. A HC should be a *replacement* to the IC, not an add-on. It's a mistake to cater to those not fully decided to abandon the evangelical system.

It seems quite possible the Lord Jesus would have His own gather at the prime time of day and the prime day of the week. Meeting on sundays is not being religious, but *not* meeting on sundays could be. Really, the only consideration is: What is the most Holy Spirit saying?

How often?

Only the Holy Spirit has the answer. Only He knows the thousands of details in the lives of all concerned. A second meeting during the week doesn't imply everyone has to attend.

Where?

Same house or a rotation? As the group grows, should you split or rent a small building? Assume nothing, but rather seek the Lord's will. You will have to remind each other often: The HC is not the lord of the HC.

Pulpit or no pulpit?

Are the purposes of the Lord Jesus better served by utilizing a pulpit? Or not? Together discern what "the Spirit of the Lord" is saying.

A meal?

Many HCs share a meal, same as did the twelve with Lord Jesus hundreds of times, a great way to bond. On the other hand, you may conclude a meal is an unwarranted encumbrance.

A communion service?

1 Corinthians 11: 24-26: *And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*

"Do this in remembrance of Me." Lord Jesus is who it's all about - your HC, your entire christianity. This could be coordinated with the meal (if there is a meal). What a great way to be collectively focused on Lord Jesus. And if communion, how often? Weekly? Monthly?

Time limit?

If so, how many minutes should one be given to speak? Seven minutes? Ten minutes? This would be impossible to monitor if the gathering was merely a back-and-forth conversation.

Music?

One possibility is to listen to the 24/7 live streaming praise and worship at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. (See note.) Another is guitars (or whatever). Another is a soft instrumental CD. Or a combination. Everyone is free to sing a solo or lead in song, as the Spirit of the Lord so inspires.

Everyone should be on guard against the tendency to build and to do and to accomplish. Give serious consideration to this promise of the Lord Jesus….

John 15:5: *"He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit."*

That's much fruit as in *much* fruit. The serious abider doesn't bear *little* fruit, nor *some* fruit. But *much* fruit. And consider….

John 15:8: *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit."*

That's much fruit as in *much* fruit. Seems like the Father isn't glorified by *little* fruit or *some* fruit. But *much* fruit. Jesus bore much fruit. Quality of relationship can be gauged by quantity of fruit.

The agenda of your HC should be to continually enrich relationship, and not attempt to produce fruit. Do not make the same error as many (most?) ICs.

Every HC will have its distinct flavor, just as one christian 'tastes' different than the next. Perhaps, just perhaps, your HC gathering will look something like this….

Although the gathering starts at ten in the morning, there are already a few early arrivals who have come early to pray for the gathering unto Christ. Greeting arrivals at the door is somewhat hushed, everyone maintaining a reverence unto Him. At ten a.m. soft instrumental music begins, and a few line up at the pulpit to invite the Holy Spirit to officiate the meeting, and to empower all to stay focused on Lord Jesus. When someone speaks, the music is turned down, and when nobody is at

the pulpit the music is turned up. Preference is always given to the speaker. As the meeting progresses one (or more) has a testimony, one (or more) has a teaching, one reads from the gospels, one a psalm, another from a book that magnifies the Lord Jesus, another reads her poem, another invites the Lord Jesus to manifest His presence, a sister prophesies, a brother leads in song, etcetera. Between speakers there is reverent silence. This is all followed by a happy meal, concluded by the breaking of bread and drinking "the fruit of the vine". And this is followed by prayer ministry.

Yes, your gathering might look like that, and it might not. The HC truly led by the Holy Spirit could be in for surprises, could be like no other HC. Who knows what adventures the Holy Spirit has for those who look to Him for guidance?

Note: Google *IHOP-KC*.

T H E S I S # 86

Elders must not yield to the temptation to take over the group, but rather apply their influence to safeguard the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

(See note.) 1Pet5:3: "Lead them by your own good example."

How are elders to lead "the flock that God has entrusted to" them?

"Lead them by your own good example."

One more time: How do elders lead?

"Lead them by your own good example."

It's baseball season. On most teams there are a few particularly talented and dedicated players who have but one obsession, to win. But this is a team sport, and unless all players give their best winning will be but a dream. How can the few instill their skills and determination into the others?

"Lead them by your own good example."

Because they have the talent they have the respect and because they have the respect they have opportunity to influence. By example the gifted minority can lift team spirit dramatically. They can boost the others by creating and maintaining a positive atmosphere in the dugout, and, more important, playing with consistent intensity on the field.

If the few respectfully submit to the authority of the coach, the entire team will emulate them, resulting in harmony, resulting in better baseball.

And more. They could invest hours hanging out with the less competitive, sharing both their savvy and enthusiasm. As they bond their passion for excellence will spread, creating a winning attitude.

It is unnecessary to hold an official position to affect the outcome of any team sport. Same applies to the house church….

Elders have opportunity to positively influence the 'team' "by their own good example". As they give homage to the 'coach', the Lord Jesus Christ, defer to the Holy Spirit, and bond with those less passionate, they will create a wholesome atmosphere.

Elders must never 'play' coach.

Evangelicalism was created by elders not content with merely *functioning* as elders but assuming official positions, the 'office' of pastor, bishop, et al. Although evidence against officiating is plentiful and international, hc's, oddly, often feel a need to be officiated by an elder in their gatherings.

The Holy Spirit will officiate…. if invited.

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Note: This is taken from a series of articles, *333* WORDS…. *Exactly*. (333words.org)

T H E S I S # 87

One does not require any person's permission to start a house church once he or she has been so directed by God.

If Pastor Whoever decided to hold a wednesday evening Bible study in his home, would he ask your permission to do so? Certainly not, because what he does in his home is nobody's business. Why, then, should you feel a need to obtain his blessing to have a Bible study, prayer group, or house church in your home?

What you do at home or anywhere other than the church building is between you and Lord Jesus. It is to Him you will one day give an account.

Galatians 1:15-17 (NLT): *Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was.*

At the time Paul was referencing, preaching Christ to gentiles was just not done; Peter had not yet received his "housetop" vision commissioning him to take the gospel to other nations. And Paul was the new kid on the block. Even so, he did not "consult with those who were apostles before was."

The Lord spoke and Paul obeyed. That's the way christianity is supposed to work. To seek the approval of man must be an insult to Lord Jesus. Because He is the Lord. Because He is the "head of the church". Because He is "the captain of salvation".

God did not appoint any man to be a mediator between Christ and christian. Evangelicalism did, but

that doesn't count; if it does count you have a problem. But it doesn't count (right?), so…. no problem.

It is, however, a serious matter to start a HC. One should do so prayerfully, earnestly seeking the will of the Lord. Same applies to attaching yourself to an existing HC. We simply do not know how to captain our own ship. But the Holy Spirit does. He knows everything.

T H E S I S # 88

The most feeble, slack christian is immeasurably wealthier than the most successful non-christian.

Somewhere on planet earth is the oldest person. And somewhere lives the prettiest and most homely. Located in one of the nations is the world's wealthiest, the world's strongest, the world's smartest. Just where these extraordinary people are, only our God knows.

Somewhere, only our God knows, is the dumbest christian alive, probably ever so slightly dumber than the second dumbest.

The Lord calls us sheep, a fitting description because sheep can be simple minded. In every flock can be found the one who stays closest to the shepherd, and also the one who strays further than all other strays. Somewhere in Christ's universal church can be found both the most fervent and the most slack christian. Where he/she lives only our God knows.

This slack christian bears fruit, but only a tiny amount. Good thing he (she) isn't entirely fruitless or the Vinedresser ("My Father is the vinedresser") would eject him ("Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away").

This guy started off well. He was "a wise man" who heard the gospel and responded. Eventually, only our God knows when, he became "a foolish man" who rejected *The Great Invitation* to abide, in a meaningful way, in Christ. Was it love of money, love of self, love of whatever? Only our God knows. When he appears before "the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" he will be most forlorn and regretful. He will be one of many who "will be saved, yet so as by fire". (See note # 1.)

Yes, somewhere someone has earned the distinction as the world's most feeble christian. Who this person is, only our God knows.

And somewhere on one of the seven continents is the most successful non-christian. Perhaps he is an honored leader of a primitive tribe with lots of subservient wives and dozens of kids who think he's the greatest. Perhaps she recently won a beauty contest and has been selected by classmates as the most likely to succeed. Perhaps he's one of millions of salesmen throughout the world who can count on being greeted by a respectful wife and adoring children when returning home after another prosperous day. Perhaps she is an arabian princess who has been doted over all her life by loving parents and servants, and will have the pick of handsome and wealthy suitors. Where exactly this most successful non-christian lives, only our God knows.

And yet the eternal outcome of the slacker is enormously superior than that of the thriver.

(See note # 2.) In the New Jerusalem city where the slacker is headed, there are thousands of paradise parks, none the same, some more glorious and radiant than others. In these parks are houses of different size and grandeur. The most glorious location in New Jerusalem is the very summit where Christ is seated at the right hand of His Father. Obviously, there has to be a least grand and glorious park having a least enviable house. If our slacker spent his eternity there, perhaps the furthest place from "the throne of God and of the Lamb", life would still be much more than a thousand times better than life on earth.

The Bible teaches there are degrees of torment in hell. Let us suppose our most successful non-christian was a compassionate woman who lived respectfully, gave to the poor, was faithful to her family – and ended up in the least terrible vicinity in hell. Nonetheless, her eternal life will be much more than a thousand times worse than anyone on earth.

It is better to be the slackest christian than the most successful non-christian, though both will be regretful.

Note # 1: Hopefully nothing in this chapter suggests eternal security (once saved always saved).

Note # 2: Suggested reading: *Heaven and the Angels*, by H.A. Baker.

T H E S I S # 89

Failure of christians does not make Christ and His gospel less authentic.

Abraham's descendents, "the children of Israel", were to be a light to the nations. They were not. Other peoples were supposed to see the advantages of being connected to God through a covenant relationship. Didn't often happen.

Deuteronomy 7:6: *"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."*

The moral record of God's chosen people was worse than dismal; it was abhorrent.

Deuteronomy 4:7: *"What great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?"*

The answer to this question: none. And yet….

Jeremiah 2:11 (NLT): *"Has any nation ever traded its gods for new ones, even though they are not gods at all? Yet my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols."*

Though His "holy people" were treacherous in betrayal over many centuries, God has remained steadfast in His holiness, in His perfection, in His justice, in His mercy. God always was, and God was always the same. God always will be, and God always will be the same. "I am the Lord; I do not change."

Though misrepresented, His promises to His "stiff-necked" people never lost authenticity, not a smidgen.

Christians live under a better covenant than the "childen of Israel", with far better promises, paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Our claim is that God loves mankind so much He actually became a man for the purpose of becoming an acceptable sacrificial Lamb as payment for a complete and total salvation - which includes an eternity of bliss and rapture beyond human ability to describe. Yes, we actually believe God, "very God of very God" (as expressed in the Nicene Creed), entered the human race to rescue us from sin and Satan.

It is natural for non-believers to peruse Christ's people to determine if Christ and His gospel are believable. In this regard we often fail them (and Lord Jesus). *Another 95* reveals some of our weaknesses, but not most.

Yet each of us has undergone a major transformation when first "born of the Spirit". The gospel is true, though we often are not true to the One who redeemed us. Sad.

T H E S I S # 90

Non-christians are incapable of committing a crime Jesus is unwilling or unable to forgive.

Actually, that is not true. There are two unforgiveable sins. First….

Luke 12:10: *"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven."*

And there is another unforgiveable sin: unforgiveness.

Matthew 6:15: *"If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

Other than these two, our Lord Jesus has forgiven every type of gross sin imaginable to man, perhaps every imaginable sin millions of times since Adam. Serial killers have found redemption, as well as child molesters and pimps and satanists and so many etceteras.

A brother in Christ once confided he had committed every sin except murder before finding Christ. A

violent and twisted New York gang leader testifies how he was suddenly saved and set free, and since has led many teens to Christ. (See note.)

Not only is Jesus *willing* to forgive, He *wants* to forgive. That's why the Holy Spirit "convict the world of sin". Without this conviction no person could be saved.

John 3:17: *"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."*

Note: *Run Baby Run* by Nicky Cruz.

T H E S I S # 91

More than any other person in the Bible, Jesus warned of an eternal hell. Eternity is a long time.

There are actually two hells….

Luke 16:19-24 (NLT): *Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. The rich man shouted, "Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.'"*

The Lord Jesus often spoke in parables, and many take comfort this very scary story of Lazarus and the rich man was but a parable. Others point out that Jesus never used names (Lazarus, Abraham) in a parable, and therefore this must be a true account of real people in a real location. It does seem so.

Luke 16:26 (NLT): *"There is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there."*

This place of "torment", let's call it hell # one, is located in what the New Testament calls (in greek), "hades". Hades, a place of huge proportions, is divided into two great sections, one pleasant and one terrible. Abraham and Lazarus were in the paradise section. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise", the same paradise that held Abraham, Lazarus, and the great multitude who placed their trust in the coming Messiah. This paradise is now empty, as the Lord Jesus had, at that time, led the eager multitudes into heaven.

The other section, hell # one, was separated from paradise by "a great chasm". Obviously, the population of # one has greatly increased since the rich man's encounter with Abraham. This place of torment, though a place of torment, is nothing compared to *gehenna* (in greek), "the lake of fire". Let's call gehenna hell # two.

Hell # two is now empty. Those dying Christ-less go immediately into # one, not # two. At some future time "the dead" (the spiritually dead) will be removed from # one and brought before the Lord Jesus at His "great white throne" where they will be judged according to their works on earth. From there they are cast into hell # two (which has varying degrees of punishment). "And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

So "the rich man" (no longer rich) is still where he was, in hell # one. There will be a day when he will have to face our Lord to be judged according to his earthly deeds. From this judgment he will be cast, permanently, into hell # two. Sad. Very sad.

T H E S I S # 92

There is no redeemer on the other side of death. Immediately after death the non-christian will fully realize his/her opportunity to gain Christ's salvation has passed.

(See note.) It was about sixteen years ago, and my wife Rachel and I were at a Sunday evening service at the Rutland Gospel Tabernacle church. The pastor had preached a message about the reality of a literal hell. I had heard this same word before from other preachers, yet I listened intently.

The service over, most people were headed for home when I noticed a Christian brother kneeling at the front of the church by himself. I discerned that he was struggling, so I joined him. What

happened next is hard to put into words, but I feel I must try. I've got something very important to say and I ask you to hear me.

I was suddenly taken into the spiritual realm, into the place of the departed souls, those who had died without having received Christ as their Savior. God let me feel what they felt. I experienced the agony of eternal separation from God, and it is this sense of eternal hopelessness that I am trying to convey.

The feelings, the emotions of hopelessness I cannot describe. The despair, the agony of separation I cannot fully relate. But I felt them, tasted of them. No, I didn't feel the torment of flames – Jesus spared me that – but the total separation from the One who can save and deliver. And I was made to feel what it's like to have rejected Him and to be in the situation of never being able to accept Him. For the opportunity has slipped by. There is no Redeemer in hell.

That life, the life in hell, has no Savior, no Redeemer. It is *this* life, life on earth, that has hope. *This* life has opportunity. *This* life offers a time to change. Only in *this* life is there redemption. In *this* life we set our eternal destinies.

In hell there are no choices. The time of decisions is past. One is conscious of one's past life, conscious of what once was, but fully aware that it was now all over. ALL OVER. In that spiritual encounter I had this sense that I was taken down, and I could only look back up with memories of what once was. But I couldn't go back. I no longer had choices. Before, there was always a chance. I had a Redeemer, even if I rejected Him. At least there was hope. I could always choose Him if I wanted.

But now! There was no Redeemer to save me. Cry as I might, no one would rescue me. I became totally aware that the Redeemer is for life on earth, not life after death. The souls here had no hope. I know that I keep saying those words. No hope. Hopelessness. Eternal, ceaseless hopelessness. Oh what grief! Oh what sorrow!

I cried out loud in that church. I screamed. The people who had not yet gone home after the service looked on amazed, not knowing what was happening to me.

And why was this happening? Sermons were fine, but often they don't affect us as they should. God wanted me to know what the lost felt. He wanted me to experience eternal hopelessness. Perhaps I lacked compassion for the unsaved. It certainly gave me an appreciation of my salvation.

I thank God that I have made my peace with Him. I had long ago accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. I know my sins are forgiven, and my name is written in the *Lamb's Book of Life*. I have found redemption through His shed blood for my guilt and iniquities. I am not ashamed to be called by His name and to confess Him as Lord. I so appreciate what He did for me at the cross. He made a way of escape for every one of us.

Hell was something that I was casual about. But my experience has forever changed me. What was just words on pages of Holy Scripture I have felt for myself in this experience. But praise God I also have experienced forgiveness and the joy of knowing my destiny is now in God's loving hands. And my future is in heaven with my Redeemer.

But what about you?

I want you to know that there is no such word as hopelessness in this life. You may think that you have sinned too much. You may think that you are beyond God's mercy. But you're not. The Bible says, *"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

And that's the issue. Christ is the issue. It doesn't matter what you feel – feelings come and feelings go – but rather what you *decide.* What is your decision? What will you do with Christ?

Note: Richard Crocker had years ago written this article for *The Main Issue* (available at www.larryjones.ca). Both Richard and his wife Rachel are now in "the New Jerusalem".

T H E S I S # 93

Non-christians attempting to gain heaven by self-effort or religious observances will fail.

If there was another way - why Calvary?

If we could erase our sins by good works - why the cross?

If religious observance was sufficient - why the 39 lashes?

If I can make it without help - why the crown of thorns?

If man's religion can save - why did He come?

If self-sacrifice is the key to heaven - why the spittle in His face?

If my best is good enough - why the nails?

If I could pray my way out of hell - why the rods?

If I didn't require a redeemer - why was One sent?

T H E S I S # 94

The love of Christ for the non-christian far surpasses the love of any man or angel for Christ.

1 John 4:8: *God is love.*

John didn't merely say, "God is loving." He said, "God is love."

Love is what God is. Since God is immeasurable, love is immeasurable. Since God is eternal, love is eternal.

God doesn't do anything in part. He loves fully. To be loved by God is to be loved immeasurably and eternally 100%.

No human could adequately relate the love that the Father, "the Son of His love", and the Holy Spirit have for you. And yet if we search Scripture we might get glimpses....

1 Samuel 17:34,35: *David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth."*

There is a love bond between a kind shepherd and the sheep in his flock. David risked his life for the sake of a lamb. When we see love in action we see God, for "God is love".

1 Samuel 17:36: *"Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."*

Here we see a beautiful depiction of a young man's love for his God. David was righteously indignant against a foreigner defying his God and deriding God's people.

Matthew 10:29 (NLT): *"What is the price of two sparrows - one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it."*

How can the Father be mindful of countless of birds? We only know He can be and is. As He cares for each bird individually, He cares for you individually.

Isaiah 49:15 (NLT): *"Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you!"*

The love of a nursing mother is but a hint of the love God has for you. A child's love for his puppy does not compare. Nor does the most loving wife's affection for the most lovable husband.

John 3:16: *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.*

God had one Son and He gave Him to you (and everyone else), knowing His Son would suffer Calvary, knowing His Innocent would bear your sins "in His own body on the tree". That's love.

John 1:3: *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

Jesus Christ made you. You are a creation of perfection. You are an outgrowth of love, for Jesus is love. You are who you are because He is who He is. The Lord's love for you has never decreased since you were first conceived, though you may have sinned grievously. He only loves fully. He has no ability to love less than 100%.

John 15:13: *"Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."*

Jesus "lay down" His life that you could be saved, if you choose to be saved, from the consequences of your sins. And more….

Romans 8:16,17: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.*

You are included in His family. His Father becomes your Father. You actually become an heir of God. What more can He give?

1 John 3:1: *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*

Yes, behold.

T H E S I S # 95

A non-christian becomes a christian by embracing Christ into his/her life, and accepting Christ's cross as payment for his salvation. This is done in prayer. Embracing Christ is submitting to Christ. Submitting to Christ is submitting to the Bible (as one is progressively enlightened to understand it).

Lord Jesus, I hear Your call to "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Lord Jesus, I come to You now in sincere prayer.

Lord Jesus, I certainly am heavy laden, as are all who live independent from their Maker. I accept Your Great Invitation *to abide in You, and I consciously and deliberately sever all other attachments by which I have attempted to draw pleasure and nourishment, that I might be connected to You alone, "the true vine".*

Lord Jesus, I repent of a selfish and self-centered life, and all my immorality expressed in so many deviant ways. Please forgive me.

Lord Jesus, You said, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." Sir, I come to You now. I come to receive You and Your great salvation, trusting You will add my name to "the Book of life".

By an exercise of the free will You have given, I choose *You as my one and only Shepherd. I* choose *to always be the sheep grazing near his Keeper. I* choose *to never stray from Your love and care.*

And I choose *You as my Redeemer. Though I will endeavor to please You, I will never consider good works as part payment for my redemption; that would be stupid indeed. I place my trust in You alone, what You have accomplished on my behalf.*

And I choose *You as the one and only Savior from the consequences of my many sins. I trust You to save me from hell, and to usher me into heaven when life on earth passes.*

And I choose *You as my Lord. I understand there is a huge difference between the christian who follows christians and the christian who follows You, the Christ. Lord, by Your grace I will never be a follower of men. I acknowledge You alone as "the head of the church". As such, I will take orders from You as expressed by the Holy Spirit. I will endeavor to live in harmony with "the brethren", to have a heart to submit, and to consider others better than myself. But You alone will I serve. You alone will I obey.*

And I choose You as my King. Yes Lord Jesus, from this moment forth I actually have a King! And as "King of all kings", I choose You as my object of worship. May I worship You with more than words; may I worship You with obedience.

And I choose *You as My Teacher. As men preach, I will try to discern Your voice, Your wisdom, Your instructions. And Lord Jesus, I bow to* The Word, *and will pay special diligence to the words in red. My Bible heroes will be those who loved You most and sacrificed their lives for Your purposes.*

And Lord I choose *You as my Sanctifier. I* choose *to be Your set apart one, to be elevated from glory to glory in holy living.*

Now my Lord, I sincerely ask You…

Protect me from compromise by daily pouring abundant grace into me. Help me to be the overcomer You call us to be. May my life bear much fruit, because it is much fruit that glorifies the Father.

Lord Jesus, the Bible teaches You resist the proud, and give grace to the humble. May I always choose humility. May pride disgust me thoroughly.

May I never sin the sin of ingratitude. May the cross always be before me as a compass and great treasure. And if You should call me to preach may my main theme always be "Jesus Christ and Him crucified".

Make me more than a convert. Fashion me into a faithful disciple. May insincerity and frivolity be far from me always.

Send people into my life who give You first place. I will be discipled only by those who do not bend the knee to man or things. Give me "ears to hear" that I may know what You are saying by the Holy Spirit through my brothers and sisters.

Lord Jesus, should I fail You and the Father, should I grieve the Holy Spirit, I will not be the stupid person who hides in shame, but rather the wise prodigal who quickly returns repentant to the loving, caring Father.

Lord Jesus, into Your hands I fully commit my life.