THEY DON'T WANT HIM!

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Category: John Fifteen

Article # one: **Intro**

There is something wrong.

The born-again experience should initiate a fruitful christian lifestyle. The babe in Christ should soon become an adult warrior. Childhood is something to be passed through. The intended outcome of the newborn is an adult, a woman or a man, mature and able. Paul was such a man.

Paul was a man. Though threatened, stoned, beaten and incarcerated, he did his job, finished his course, and did so without whining. He never pampered himself. A man keeps his body in submission.

Paul was a man. He lived fully. There was zest in that soul. Though bruised, he conquered. Though rejected, he preached. He was faithful.

Is there someone akin to Paul in your christian community? Look around. Do you see spiritual men or sucklings? Women or wimps? Soldiers or civilians? Are the faithful or the careless the majority?

There is something wrong. Seriously wrong. Can't you see it?

Miracles occur elsewhere. Sick christians become dead christians. T.V. "is the opium of the people." The prayer closet is a storage room, god comfort is king, the preacher's well is dry, the lost stay lost. What is wrong?

I think I know.

"They don't want Him! They don't want Him!"

Let me explain.

I was talking to a family friend - well, truthfully, I was talking *at* a family friend - my mouth was motoring pretty good, saying stuff like, "What is missing in the church is none other than Jesus Christ." And, "I call Him *The Forgotten One."* Etc.

She is a seasoned christian, this family friend, classy, her speech layered with grace, certainly not radical or opinionated. Had I gone too far, said too much? And then she responded:

"They don't want Him! They don't want Him!"

That's all she said. What is she talking about? Who is *Him?* Who are *they?* Perhaps she hadn't been hearing me. Days later - yes, *days* later - I got it.

Him is Jesus Christ. *They* are christians (yes, the born-again type, the only kind there is). Wow! Even I had never said, or even thought, something so extreme. But she was right! "They don't want Him!" is both the problem and the bottom line within evangelicalism and beyond.

I would add one word to "They don't want Him!" *Enough. They* want Christ, but not enough.

Enough for what? Enough to seat Him on the throne of their lives.

But again, who are *they?*

First, *they* are not everyone. Some, praise the Lord!, want Him..... enough. Who love Christ more than life. Who *is* their life.

But *they* are definitely the majority. *They* are Joe and Jill Average Christian, family and friends, acquaintances and customers. *They* attend church, don't swear or smoke or spit, and don't hang with those who smoke and swear and spit.

They are the lukewarm, the spiritual sleepy, less than conquerors. For sure, they are as *in* as the fervent..... in God's grace, in the family, in the book of life. As the faithful, they are never ignored by the Lord.

But life is a travesty. Not only will they - I am speaking of the majority! - miss their destiny, their high calling, they won't even know, this side of heaven, what that destiny is. I think there are multitudes in heaven who would trade *they* places, consider it a privilege to enter once more the battle zone for men's souls. You see, up there there is only fervency.

There is something wrong, and that something is a lack of want for our beautiful Jesus. The answer is conversion - again. The answer is not ahead - some experience not yet had or teaching not yet heard - but behind, an altar once a dwelling place, a fervor once kept. We know a viable relationship with Jesus is attainable because we once attained it. He was the center and can be again.

Thus this series of articles. (Thus this website.)

C h a l l e n g e : *Perhaps you are fervent or perhaps you are not. No matter who you are, there is more. If your life is worth a hundred dollars it could be worth a thousand. If it's worth a thousand it could be worth a million. Christian, there is more. In Christ (with Christ, by Christ), there is more. You can run and complete, influence and conquer, gain and win. In Christ. Only in Christ.*

P r a y e r : *Holy Spirit, words fall ineffectual to the ground without Your unction. To the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, anoint the truths of this message. To Him be all praise.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # two: **Idols**

J o h n : *Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.* (1John 5:21)

WHAT IS AN IDOL? Let's go into the Amplified: *Little children, keep yourselves from idols (false gods) – (from anything and everything that would occupy the place in your heart due to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life). Amen (so let it be).*

"From any sort of *substitute*." The lordship of Christ is substituted by someone or something. That someone or something is an idol. Yesterday one obeyed Christ; today obeisance is toward another.

ARE IDOLS COMMON? Very. Joe Average Evangelical has several. That is why he is so impotent. That is why he is bored. That is why most of his prayers go unanswered.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN? It didn't happen quickly. In each of our lives we have crossroads of decision. Lots of them. One choice is to obey Christ, the other to disobey Christ. Obedience draws us closer to Him, but His ways often seem less pleasant and exciting than the other way.

Of course the other way results in less of Him. Eventually less of Him becomes little of Him. Lukewarmness, with all its pains and penalties and complications, sets in. Rather than suffer the pangs of conviction, one enters into denial. *Me, lukewarm? You've got to be kidding!* And he stops speaking the Name.

Such has joined the very large "They don't want Him (enough)!" gang.

We each have the awesome power to both seat Christ on the throne of our lives and to dethrone Him. We would never say, "Jesus, do you mind stepping down?" We don't have to. Jesus knows when our desire to come under His lordship is less than our desire for the lordship of another. He knows when we have crossed the line, when, at our crossroads, our decisions to obey are outnumbered by our decisions to go the other way.

And when He steps down Joe Average denies, even and especially to himself, that He has been dethroned. Joe plays the game, continuing to attend church and do churchy stuff and put on a happy face and speak christian jargon. Much energy is spent convincing others he is doing just great, and others, in response, assure Joe he is doing just great. Joe has spent more years in this repugnant religiosity than he has in meaningful relationship. Joe is not a happy camper.

WHY WOULD ANYONE CHOOSE 'THE OTHER WAY'? I am sure fallen angels asked themselves, "Why did we choose the other way?" Undoubtedly Adam and Eve often gave their heads a shake and asked each other, "Why did we choose the other way?" The other way was quite popular with the children of Israel. Cain and Joseph's brothers and Saul and many etceteras went there. So did Judas. Christians choosing the other way ushered in the dark ages. At the judgment seat of Christ multitudes will be asking themselves, "Why did I choose the other way instead of the way of Christ?"

SO WHAT'S THE ANSWER? The answer, of course, is Christ. Oops! - that's not quite correct. The

answer is *faith in* Christ. Joe Average returns to Christ the same way he first came to Christ as a non-christian. He acknowledges his sins - chiefly the sin of unbelief - repents, and embraces once again the lordship of Jesus Christ.

HOW DOES JOE AVOID MAKING THE SAME MISTAKE? That's a huge question. Joe, now not-so-Average Joe, must realize he cannot keep himself from backsliding again. On his own lukewarmness will again creep in. We all must realize our dependence on Christ, the head of the church, to keep us in fervency. Without Christ we can't; with Christ we can. "Without Me you can do nothing." And, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The Holy Spirit empowers us to develop an intimate and fruitful relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives us authority to cast down contrary thoughts and temptations. The Holy Spirit is the evangelist who brings the once-converted back to Christ, and He has the keeping power to preserve our Christ-directed love. He only needs our cooperation.

C h a l l e n g e : *There's more! There's more, there's more, there's more! There is more of Christ to be experienced! With more of Christ comes more of every good thing. No, I'm not talking instant* - more *comes slowly - but consistent. Christ will consistently reveal Himself to the hungry. Not hungry? "Jesus, make me consistently hungry for more of You. In Your name."*

P r a y e r : *Jesus, You said if I abide in You and Your words abide in me, I will ask what I desire and it shall be done for me. Jesus, my Lord and King, anoint this message with Your most Holy Spirit. In Your name. I receive it now as I pray, and I give You sincere thanks.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!)

Article # three: **The Tongue: The Heart's Ambassador**

So you just can't believe "They don't want Him (enough)!" Not want Christ? It just can't be! Hmmm. Let's look at it.

J E S U S : *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* (Mat. 12:34)

What is in will come out. What we say says who we are. The tongue is the heart's ambassador. To know what is in your heart simply monitor your words.

Lovers of money speak money. Lovers of food speak food. Lovers of business speak business. And lovers of Christ speak Christ.

Lovers of Christ speak Christ. Yes, they speak money and food and business as well; living down here calls for that. But Jesus is the emphasis - because Jesus is the heart's chief occupant.

The spiritual health of an individual can be determined by the words she speaks. Likewise the spiritual health of a christian community can be determined by their collective words.

To know, listen. When is the last time someone in your circle spoke of Jesus? How about the last time you coffeed with a friend..... what did, and didn't, you talk about? The last Bible study, was Jesus

mentioned….. more than, *In Jesus' name, amen?*

Generally, preachers don't preach Christ. I say, *generally.* Some, especially evangelists, preach Christ much.But Jesus is not the theme of most messages. *Believe* has been replaced by *Be good* and, *Try harder* and, *Be a team player* and, *Do it this way* and…..

Sure, Jesus is quoted once in a while, but only to underscore something other than Jesus. The King is less than focal. He is not the main issue. To come to your own conclusion, listen. As the preacher preaches, use your fingers to count the number of times the Name is mentioned. Probably you will only need one hand.

A. W. T o z e r : *I am weary of the familiar religious pep talk. I am tired of being whipped into line, of being urged to work harder, to pray more, to give more generously, when the speaker does not show me Christ.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

Paul was not your average preacher. Paul preached Christ. ("I determined not to know anything….. except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.") Paul thanked God through Christ. ("I thank my God through Jesus Christ.") Paul blessed others in Christ's name. ("Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.") Paul served Christ. ("An apostle of Jesus Christ.") Paul loved Christ. ("To live is Christ.") Paul longed to be with Christ. ("To die is gain.") Paul was prepared for the judgment seat of Christ. ("There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.") For Paul, life was Christ, Christ, Christ.

And Christ preached Christ: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "I am the light of the world." "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "Follow Me."

Paul preached Christ, Peter preached Christ, John preached Christ and Christ preached Christ; yet Joe Average Preacher does not preach Christ. Why? The answer is harsh: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." If it's not in there it won't come out. (Now again, I am speaking of relationship, not sonship.)

Many are *God* christians. They speak *God* often and *Jesus* rarely. Everything is *God, God, God.* I can hear you asking, "What's wrong with that?"

Although the New Testament speaks *God* much, it speaks *Christ* more. Christ is central in New Testament writings because Christ is central in heaven. He is referred to or spoken of at least five times more than the Father and the Holy Spirit combined. And *Christ* far outnumbers *God.* That's the way the Father decreed it be. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit decreed that God the Son was to be central in heaven and on earth. "God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." So what's the point?

The point is there's something wrong down here. If heaven and the Bible have their speech right, and we speak otherwise, something must be wrong. And something *is* wrong, terribly so.

There is power in the name of Christ. When a christian speaks *Christ* something good happens to her. And that is why christians (I'm speaking generally) do not speak Christ. *Hunh?* Let me explain.

There has been, and always will be, a battle for the throne of your life. Christ is not seated on the throne of Jill Average Christian, Jill is. Or one of her many idols. Whoever or whatever is seated there feels threatened whenever the Name is mentioned, so the Name is rarely mentioned.

More of Christ and much of Christ is available to all. Those who have little have little because they want little. Simply put, "They don't want Him!"..... enough, enough to dethrone god *me*.

Speaking *God* is vague, ambiguous. *God* might make god *me* uncomfortable, but not seriously threatened. But the name of Jesus, that's different. That Name makes both demons and *me* tremble.

Again, the tongue is the heart's ambassador. Your heart and that of your friends and your christian community is revealed by words spoken. To know, listen.

C h a l l e n g e : *When you first entered the family of God, through Jesus Christ, you invited Christ to sit on the throne of your life. Is He still there? Or has Jesus become something less than lord? Your problem isn't that you have not been good enough, but your trust in Christ has lessened. Where will you go from here?*

P r a y e r : *Father, when we drift from Your Son we drift from You. You do not love us less; You simply await our return. Kindly anoint this word with the most Holy Spirit, and draw the lukewarm back to passion and intimacy. In His name.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # four: **Your Christian Community (Part 1)**

It makes good sense to know the spiritual condition of the christian community in which you live. Because its condition affects your condition. Bear with me as we look at four christian communities. First the

G a l a t i a n s : Paul was angry at the Galatians for "turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel," and the Judaizers who led them astray - "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off (mutilate themselves)!" Next we will consider the

T h e s s a l o n i a n s : This church was different. Paul wrote of their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." They were evangelistic: "From you the word of the Lord sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place." They were drawing closer to Christ: "Your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of you all abounds toward each other." And now the third,

M y c h r i s t i a n c o m m u n i t y : The spiritual state of my city is above average. From here, many have gone out to the nations; perhaps every nation has been visited by at least one from my

community. And people regularly come from various nations to minister. However, I have no doubt my city has more in common with the Galatians than the Thessalonians.

Most sunday services are, to be charitable, less than exciting; none (that I know of) are led by the Holy Spirit. As in most cities, the body of Christ is divided into the clergy (or ministerial) and the laity, the special and not-so-special. Though acquainted with many christians, I do not know one who embraces the Bible as his or her sole authority. Not one. Those intent on fulfilling the high calling in their lives are few.

Sadly, most are content with their bland religious diet. (Happily, there is a rising discontent with the same old, same old.) The many local evangelical churches are built on, structured after, the sands of traditionalism rather than the rock of Christ's sayings. Most have replaced the lordship of Christ with the lordship of man. Jesus, mostly, is ignored, in church and out. Signs and wonders and miracles occur elsewhere. I would have to put my christian community in the "They don't want Him (enough)!" crowd. And now number four,

Y o u r c h r i s t i a n c o m m u n i t y : I don't know which of the above is most akin to your town or city. But can you see the importance of *you* knowing?

If you lived in Galatia many years ago, what do you think would become of you? Chances are you would be Joe Average Galatian. Not good. But if you were attached to the Thessalonians a flame for Christ would be flickering in your heart.

You are, to a large extent, a product of your spiritual community. You assimilate (absorb). You are influenced by who you sit under, gaze upon, associate with. If your people are, as the Thessalonians, believing believers (and not *un*believing believers) chances are you are one also. If Galatian unbelief has gripped your people, it probably has your heart as well.

You must realize you can't get more of Christ from people who do not want more of Christ. It is most important where you place your ears - both belief and unbelief are contagious. Words affect. Words produce after themselves. Both the fervent and the lukewarm have babies.

A. W. T o z e r : *The truth is that for better or for worse religious people follow leaders.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

A. W. T o z e r : *"Like priest, like people," sums up in four words a truth taught plainly in the Scriptures and demonstrated again and again in religious history.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

J a m e s : *We put bits in horses' mouths and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are often driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!* (James 3:3-5)

Words are packed with power. Words entering your ears slide down to your heart. "Keep your heart

with all diligence." I recently heard of a preacher who said, "If you're not being fed in your church, get out." That's good. Never heard a preacher say that before. Amen and amen!

Galatians don't make Thessalonians. "They don't want Him (enough)!" christians can only make "They don't want Him (enough)!" christians.

It makes good sense to assess the spiritual condition of your christian community. You assess by listening. It's really not that difficult.

I can *hear* the frustration and concern: *But what do I do? Where do I go? I will lose my friends. The church down the road is not much better.*

We get ourselves into a lot of complications, but the answer to every problem is always simple. The answer is (faith in) Jesus Christ. Yes, simple, but not easy. If you want easy stay where you are. Committing yourself fully to Christ and His words (the Bible) will bring problems you never had before. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Christ never said His way was easy; He repeatedly said otherwise.

You have been given the Holy Spirit who "will guide you into all truth." All truth includes where you hang out. Submit to the governorship of the Holy Spirit and He *will* govern.

You see, you don't have to do anything except what Christ, who communicates through His Holy Spirit, tells you to do. Your ability to see the problem with all its ramifications is limited. His is perfect. You must know you can't and He can. You can get yourself into a negative predicament, but you can't get yourself out. Remind yourself who is the lord of your life. Remind yourself who is the head of the church. If you are outside His will, if your relationship with Him has deteriorated, if you have placed yourself under inferior ministry - "Jesus, get me out of this mess!"

"Ask, and it will be given to you." Don't ask, and it won't be given to you. You need God's grace to get out of any bad scene you get into. Peter taught us how to get this grace.

P e t e r : *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.* (1Peter 5:5,6)

Grace comes with humility. "Humble yoursel(f) under the mighty hand of God" and you will receive sufficient grace. Jesus will straighten out your life according to your faith. It might take a while, but He will bring you into the Father's will for your life.

C h a l l e n g e : *There is more! More life, more purpose, more fruit. Relationally, more of Christ. But there is a price. What will you exchange (give up) for Christ?*

P r a y e r : *Lord Jesus, if this message is pleasing in Your sight, take it here and take it there, to this brother and that sister, this town and that city, this nation and that nation. May the reader, so precious to You, be taught by the Holy Spirit to love You more. May he, may she, want You….. enough. From the shadow of the cross.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen.")

Article # five: **Your Christian Community (Part 2)**

Again, it makes good sense to assess the christian community where you live. We have this tendency to use our christian neighbors as a comparative instead of the Bible. But neighborhoods are not always healthy, and the impression we have of ourselves may be distorted. (This is in reference to the city or town you live in, not the assembly you attend - that's Part 3.)

If you lived in Galatia you might think you were okay because you equaled or surpassed most. Until you made a forthright assessment and discovered they belonged to the "They don't want Him (enough)!" crowd. Oh-oh.

A child raised by fervent Christ-centered parents will likely be spiritually healthy. One parented by an apathetic mom and dad might conclude lukewarm is normal, okay. It would be good for an outsider to give the child a biblical perspective so she would know her parents' influence is something to overcome, not embrace.

I suppose your town or city is similar to most. If so, you could have a defective perception of yourself and God's intention for your life. You must learn to see yourself from a biblical view. Only. Many believers from elsewhere don't think much of North American christianity.

B r o t h e r Y u n : *Before I traveled to the West I had no idea so many churches were spiritually asleep…. Many meetings are cold and lack the fire and presence of God we have in China….. China is experiencing revival but most places in the West are not.* (The Heavenly Man)

Perhaps it takes an outsider to show us the influence of our community is something to be overcome, not embraced. If you have any semblance to Joe and Jill Average your outlook is misaligned. Seriously.

Bear with me as I attempt to undo damage done to your perspective. I may know some things about you that you don't know about yourself. For example,

YOU ARE NOT A LAYMAN (LAYWOMAN). The word is not in the Bible, not in God's vocabulary, not in God's perspective. The word is an invention of man to describe an invention of man.

YOUR PASTOR IS JESUS CHRIST. The man you call *pastor* is not your pastor. He may be *a* pastor, but not *your* pastor. (You don't belong to him and he doesn't belong to you.) You probably know that *pastor* means *shepherd.* And I'm sure you have read the 23rd Psalm. ("The *Lord* is my shepherd.") Nowhere in the Bible does one call another *pastor.*

YOU ARE NOT ACCOUNTABLE TO ANY MAN. Paul was not accountable to Peter, Peter was not accountable to John, John was not accountable to James, and you are not accountable to Pastor Whoever or any other believer. You are accountable to the Lord Jesus.

P a u l : *Each of us shall give account of himself to God.* (Rom. 14:12)

YOU DON'T HAVE TO ATTEND 'CHURCH'. You can if you want to. Perhaps at this time in your life it is wise. But you don't have to. Paul did not attend (what we call) church. Nor did Peter or the other eleven. What we call church was not yet invented; it took many centuries to come up with this creation. (To put it lightly, I don't think the apostles would approve.)

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TITHE. Pressuring adherents to give ten percent of their earnings to the local assembly has to be one of the most corrupt practices of church history.

L a r r y J o n e s : *Why is it that fundamental churches are divided over other biblical doctrines (eternal security, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, divine healing, to name only a few), and yet seem to be in agreement on the subject of tithing? Why have other regulations of the Mosaic Law been shunned (Sabbath observance, circumcision, etc.), and this particular regulation so warmly embraced? There are no nice answers. Tithing is not a Scriptural teaching, tithing is a convenience teaching. It has been adopted because it is so very convenient. The tithing practice helps generate a tremendous flow of money through the local assemblies and that is the only reason it has been so readily accepted.* (Financing the Great Commission)

L a r r y J o n e s : *Paul did not endorse, and was not sympathetic toward, the tithing system. Paul never speaks of a tenth or a percentage, but rather a principle of equality and generosity.* (ditto)

YOU ARE NOT A DENOMINATIONAL PERSON. God never made you one. Man can't make you one. Paul wasn't one. You won't be one when you get to heaven. Considering yourself one doesn't make you one.

YOU ARE CALLED INTO THE MINISTRY. Full time ministry. As much as anyone, licensed or otherwise.

P a u l : *God…. has given us the ministry of reconciliation.* (2Cor. 5:18)

Us is me and *us* is you.

P a u l : *He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers…. for the work of ministry.* (Eph. 4:11)

You can take Paul's statement two ways. One, Paul is saying only some (and perhaps a relative few) are called to be apostles, prophets, etc. (These *few* or *some* would today be considered *clergy* or *ministerial*.) Or two, we are *all* given one of these administrative gifts "for the work of ministry." Why is it assumed everyone is not included in the four *somes?* My understanding of the english language tells me *all* christians could certainly be included. But are they? I invite you to read the third chapter of *The Way It Is.*

YOU HAVE A HIGH CALLING ON YOUR LIFE. The high calling on your life is not usher, president of the Women's League or member of the church board. It is not making lots of money to finance a church building or church government. It is much loftier than that.

You are called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world and to the church! You are called to walk through doors the Holy Spirit opens for you! You are to lay hands on the sick and see them recover! You are to be accompanied by Holy Spirit, early-church signs and wonders!

J E S U S : *You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* (John 8:32)

C h a l l e n g e : *You have been shown certain truths about yourself and your Christ. Yes, I have brought you to a crossroad. What will you do with these truths? Will you have a talk with Jesus about these important issues? Will you diligently seek the Word for yourself? Will you put Bible words above tradition words? Do you want (more of) Him….. enough?*

P r a y e r : *Lord Jesus, it would be so nice if every born-again lived and preached "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." It would be so nice if we all loved You increasingly. Lord Jesus, baptize these words in the most Holy Spirit. Set Yours free to serve You. Jesus, I ask not for a little blessing upon the reader, I ask a* large *blessing. And I ask in Your precious name.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!"*)*

Article # six: **Your Christian Community (Part 3)**

In your christian community the prime influence affecting your spiritual condition is, of course, your local church (if you attend one), and it is folly to not give it serious consideration. Is this potent influence something to be overcome (shunned?) or to be embraced? Are you being pointed to Christ?

I cannot make an assessment of your church, but you can. And you should. Weekly, perhaps two or three times a week, you receive a dosage of influence and perspective. Imperceptibly, you are being made.

If your assembly were healthy, if it had even some likeness to Acts, you would be the talk of many, even outside your locale. Typical isn't news.

Next sunday, sit at the back and take a hard look at the congregation. What fills the pews - passion or ho-hum? Christ-centeredness or religion?

I don't know about your local assembly, but I do know about most. In average evangelical church the congregation thinks and speaks more about Pastor Whoever than Jesus Christ. Not just more, but much more. Let's hear from a pastor of many years from the fifties and sixties…..

A. W. T o z e r : *It is now possible for the youngest pastor just out of seminary to have more actual authority in a church than Jesus Christ has.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

A. W. T o z e r : *Among the gospel churches Christ is now in fact little more than a beloved symbol.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

Another profound teacher of God's truths, a pastor from the same era, made a study with his congregation to determine what New Testament teachings they were not practicing, and

experiences not experiencing.....

F. J. D a k e : *Honestly listing everything we had found that we were not practicing as a church and every experience that was not normal in our lives, I had 160 points on my list. I could hardly believe my eyes, and yet there was chapter and verse for every point.* (God's Plan For Man)

Has the light of their time brightened or dimmed? This comment was made in 2002.....

B r o t h e r Y u n : *In the West many Christians have an abundance of material possessions, yet they live in a backslidden state.* (The Heavenly Man)

The problem is elementary. Sunday service is not a gathering unto Him, but a gathering unto him, Pastor Whoever. Or unto themselves. Who are more social than Joe and Jill Evangelical?

One cannot assess his/her local church without much consideration of the pastor, his role and his influence. Nobody should be down on pastors (evaluate their character and motives). And nobody should be *up* on pastors (put them on top of a double standard).

L a r r y J o n e s : *'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 another. The perspective he receives from one he passes on to the other.* (The Way It Is)

L a r r y J o n e s : *We are to break bread and drink of "the fruit of the vine" in remembrance of Jesus. It is meant to be a solemn occasion of drawing closer to our Christ. Because 'Pastor' John always leads the ceremonial observance, because he is so visible and so 'heard,' the communion service has the dual effect of remembering Jesus* and *John. The assembly is impressed by, and drawn closer to, both!* (ditto)

A. W. T o z e r : *His profession compels him to* seem *spiritual whether he is or not. Human nature being what it is, the man of God may soon adopt an air of constant piety and try to appear what the public thinks he is.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

L a r r y J o n e s : *'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..... and he is determined to prove himself faithful to those above him. There is much pressure on John to conform..... 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.* (The Way It Is)

Sitting in the back evaluating the congregation, you are in fact evaluating the pastor. The fruit speaks of the tree.

A. W. T o z e r : *The history of Israel and Judah points up a truth taught by* all *history, viz., that the masses are or soon will be what their leaders are.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Pastor Whoever on the congregation. If he is one of "they" ("They don't want Him.... enough!") the congregation will assimilate his wayward sentiments. If he is a Christ-gazer the people will become Christ-gazers.

Unfortunately, Pastor Typical has not been placed behind the pulpit because he lies prostrate before his Christ but because he lies prostrate before his denominational bosses. He long ago shifted his loyalty from Him to them. He has given himself over to another. Subsequently, many in his church have given themselves over to him.

P a u l : *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.* (2Cor. 13:5)

C h a l l e n g e : *Have you given yourself over to someone who has given himself over to someone? Will you return repentant to your Christ? Will you place yourself under the governorship of the Holy Spirit?*

P r a y e r : *Oh, mighty God! May hearts be turned to You through the simple logic and truths of these words. Make much of little. Because the reader is of infinite value to You I fervently ask the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Your Christ.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # seven: **Idols (Part 2)**

I must go back to that conversation with a family friend. I was expressing that the central Person in heaven is much less than central to most in North American evangelicalism, to which she surprisingly replied, "They don't want Him! They don't want Him!" Since, I have added one word to hers to express the chief indictment and quandary of the body of Christ..... *enough.* "They don't want Him (enough)!"

At first the thought of christians, Christ-ians, not wanting Christ above all else was less than believable, a notion one chokes on. Can't be, no way, get real. Sadly, the evidence is abundant.

The cause of most problems is this reality: "They don't want Him (enough)!"

That's why christians are sick, marriages less than enviable, little music in the heart. That's why many will weep at the judgment seat. That's why the world is going to hell.

"They" are most. Yet *most* would be ticked by such a suggestion because *most* are entrenched in denial. *Because it is good to love Christ supremely, and I most certainly am a good christian, obviously I love Christ supremely.* And, *Since only the backslidden stray from their First Love, and no way am I backslidden, I have not strayed.*

Let's take a hard look at *most.*

U n k n o w n : *All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him..... Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations.* (1Sam. 8:4,5)

All the elders. And then there's the Galatians.....

P a u l : *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you to a different gospel.* (Gal. 1:6)

And the christians in Ephesus.....

J E S U S : *You have left your first love.* (Rev. 2:4)

And the church of Sardis.....

J E S U S : *You are dead.* (Rev. 3:1)

I could go on but this is getting depressing. Sufficient to say, *most* cannot be relied upon, not always and perhaps not usually. I have seen *most* do the stupidest things.

And me? Confession time. I had once strayed from Jesus Christ. I was one of "They," one of *most.* And I didn't know it. I entered fully into denial. Religious fervor kept the obvious from being obvious. There was never a time in my life I did not want Christ but there were years I did not want Him enough.

Enough to pursue Him. Enough to seat Him upon the throne of my life. Enough to submit to His Holy Spirit.

My idol was christians. Not so much the ones beside me in the pew or the fellow in the pulpit, though they were a part of it. But the renown. The globetrotters. The faith giants. The conference celebs. (Bless them all!) Christiandom replaced Christ. Looking back, how foolish and immature.

You are a small part of *most*. *Most* influence you, insist you belong and live accordingly. And that's okay if *most* is okay. But it ain't if it ain't. (Let it be understood, *okay* is Christ-centeredness.)

Now let's look at what an idol is not. An idol is not an addiction, even a bad one. It is not a weakness. It is not a habit. It is not a failure.

An idol is a replacement. "All the elders of Israel" replaced God with a king. That king was their idol.

G O D : *They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me.* (1Sam. 8:7)

Rejected. Replaced. Exchanged.

The Galatians rejected, replaced, exchanged Christ for another. En masse they gave themselves over to the Mosaic Law and its officers.

Consider: How did the dark ages get to be the dark ages? Why are we always in need of a revival? How did liberalism get such a hold of our nations?

The answer is obvious: Idols. All around you are idols fastened to believers. How many various idols in the average evangelical assembly? Lots.

An idol can be an offspring, a spouse, a business, television, Pastor Whoever, christiandom, *me,* treasures on earth, and many etceteras.

Idols are nasty critters. They begin their career as servants and end up masters, thoroughly enjoying the worship of their idolaters. Each can boast of havoc and pain, guilt and confusion, lukewarmness and boredom.

Who could argue after reading the Bible, after inspecting church history, the majority is often (usually?) wrong? A woman of courage might ask, "Well, what about *my* majority (*my* people)?"

C h a l l e n g e : *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith," that your faith in Christ hasn't drifted, your fervency dulled.*

P r a y e r : *Jesus, the Lord of me and the God of me, You said, "Ask," so I'm asking. Bless reader and writer. Draw us ever closer to Your heart. Let fruit abound. Anoint this word.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")