

**BEYOND
THE
TORN VEIL**

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OUR INHERITANCE IN CHRIST

By
Nick Maartens

BEYOND THE TORN VEIL

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FOREWORD

It should not be necessary to write books about the Bible, for whatever needs to be said and whatever has to be known, has been written in it already. The Bible, being the inspired Word of God, is authoritative in all matters pertaining to faith and practice in the church. Tragically, we find ourselves in times where we have to contend earnestly for what was once handed down to us through Scripture. This book is about getting back to basics. It is intended for those who have grown tired of “churchianity” and who long for the fresh air of simplistic Christianity. Where to find it? We have nowhere else to go but back to the written Word of God. If “*It is written*” was good enough for Jesus, it should be good enough for us!

It is useful to consider that there may have been a purpose behind the very first miracle performed by Jesus as described in John 2. He changed six jars of ceremonial water into wine to demonstrate something of his mission to earth. We all know what the symbolic significance of the number six is – man. The six stone jars represented the rigid, man-made system of religion of the scribes and Pharisees of those days, where traditions had neutralised the Word of God (Matthew 15:6-9). Jesus changed the water into wine, which in the Bible represents the blood of the New Testament and which also symbolises the working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus once said that you cannot pour new wine into old wineskins. They would not be able to contain the activity, and would therefore tear apart. Immediately after changing the water into wine He goes up to the Temple and drives out the money changers with a whip that He made Himself. His actions must therefore have been premeditated. It was not an impulsive outburst. I can imagine

the uproar and the shrill sound of protesting voices amid the crashing of over-turning tables and the sound of rolling coins (John 2:1-17). He was expressing what many people had been feeling for a long time.

What enraged him so? The Temple was supposed to be a place where people could meet God. The priests were guilty of allowing the Temple to be used for something that God never intended. They had lost true reverence for God and his Word and the Temple had become a place where they could simply fulfil their own purposes. Is this not very close to the situation that has developed in many modern churches? The principles of the New Testament have been replaced by man-made rules, traditions and practices, and our institutions, our buildings, our plans and our programs have become the centre of our worship. We have egocentrically set up religious empires where “numbers” is the measure of success.

The religious scene is ripe for the whip. Whilst a revival of numbers is on everyone’s lips, I am of the opinion that the answer lies in the opposite direction – we need a revival of repentance of self-ism, a cleansing of the pomp of modern day money changers who are peddling the Gospel for profit, and a radical change back to simplistic New Testament standards. The priests will huff and puff like their ancient counterparts, but there will be many who will rejoice in experiencing the truth of “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

I would like to thank my brothers and sisters, locally and from elsewhere, for their fellowship over the years. Through them the New Testament church has become alive and real. I especially want to thank those who went through the manuscript for their critical evaluation and all those who had to come and help with the computer.

Nick Maartens, Matatiele, 2004.

1

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction

*“...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the **inheritance** of the saints in the kingdom of light” (Colosians1:12, emphasis mine).*

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...” (Ephesians1:18).

How would you react if you should unexpectedly be informed that you have been mentioned in the will of some rich relative that has passed away? I’m sure that after the initial thoughts of sadness you would wonder what he left you. Then I can imagine the feelings of gratitude and excitement when you find out that a large amount has been paid into your bank account.

As believers in Jesus Christ we also have reason to become very excited, because the Word of God informs us that we have been left with an inheritance together with all other believers across the world. In order for us to know what it is, a testament was left behind which can be consulted any time we want.

In order to fully appreciate our inheritance, we need to understand a few basic things about a testament. It is a document in which a person makes his will known in terms of what must happen to his affairs when he dies. Usually, after a death, the relatives of the deceased will be called together and the testament will be read to them. Any member of the family is entitled to a copy in order to familiarise himself with its contents. It is also a legal document which has authority, and it cannot be tampered with. In case of a violation of its stipulations, a judicial system can be called upon to ensure that it is executed properly.

Many Christians are spiritually so much poorer because they have never understood the New Testament to be a document in which the will of God is made known to them.

“Testament” or “Covenant?”

In Matthew 26:26 we read the following: *“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body’. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sin’”* (KJV).

In the above-mentioned text the King James Version translates the Greek word *diathéké*, as *testament*, but the NIV and some other translations translate this same word as *covenant*. According to The Complete Word Study Dictionary of Spiros Zodhiates Th.D, this Greek word is derived from *diatithemi*, meaning “to set in order, to dispose in a certain order”. In classical Greek it was used in the context **of the making of a will** by a person in the prospect of death. To confirm this, we quote what Spiros Zodhiates further says about it: *“There is ample evidence in papyri that this is the ordinary meaning in*

the New Testament.” It is unfortunate that this word *diathéké* was translated as *covenant* by some translators.

The NIV, for instance, uses *covenant* in Matthew 26:18, but then translates the same word *diathéké*, as *will* in Hebrews 9:16; “*In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it..*” The topic of discussion in the context of Hebrews 9, which is a will, does not allow *covenant* to be used. It is very important to understand that there is a subtle difference in meaning between the word *covenant* and the word *testament*.

The word “covenant” is frequently used in the Old Testament, and it relates to a mutual agreement between two parties. The Hebrew word for “covenant” is *berith*. It is in this sense that we understand the Old Covenant. The Sinaitic Covenant with Moses was a **conditional promise that God made to Israel, based on the keeping of the Law** (Deuteronomy 28).

A testament, however, is a unilateral expression of the will of the testator. Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary confirms this understanding of the word *diathéké*, as used in Matthew 26:26, explaining that: “*In contradistinction to the English word ‘covenant’, which signifies a mutual undertaking between two parties or more, each binding himself to fulfil obligations, it does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation; it mostly signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person.*” Because this meaning of the New Testament has not been properly emphasised in the church, it has been robbed of much of its authority.

The correct understanding of Matthew 26:26 is likely to have a profound impact on the life of the believer. When a person gets reborn by placing his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and becomes part of the family of God, he automatically qualifies as recipient of an inheritance as set out in the New Testament. Unfortunately, many Christians are not

enjoying the full benefit of their inheritance because through ignorance they cannot exert faith through which to make it real. In many cases the truth has been “stolen” from them because their thinking has been influenced by some traditional teachings which are not in accord with the meaning of the New Testament. On the other hand, many Christians, because of a lack of interest in spiritual things, have just thrown their inheritance away!

One can imagine what would happen if earthly testaments were treated in the same way that the church handles the Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ! – the will of the deceased would be ignored and one court case upon another would follow as heirs bickered and disputed the right of ownership of valuable articles.

When did the New Testament take effect?

Most people think that the beginning of the New Testament is indicated by the division in the Bible between the Book of Malachi and the Gospel according to Matthew. Many also think that the New Testament started with the birth of Jesus. They do not take into account the fact that it was announced by Jesus only in Matthew 26:26 at the occasion that is known as the Lord’s Supper. While breaking the bread, Jesus announced it with the following words: *“Take and eat; this is my body.”* While taking up the cup He said: *“This is my blood of the New Testament, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* At that stage not a drop of Jesus’ blood had been spilt, neither had anything happened to His body. He therefore must have been referring to some futuristic event. We now know that He was referring to what would happen to him during His crucifixion which took place very soon after he had spoken these words.

Clarification of this is provided in Hebrews 9:15-17. Here it is explained that a will or testament does not come into effect until the death of the testator, the one who made it. The King James Version puts it like this: *“For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of the testator, for a testament is of force after men are dead, otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.”* The NIV translation is: *“In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living.”*

It is therefore very clear that the New Testament started at the moment of Christ’s death on the cross. Understanding this fact is essential for interpreting the Bible correctly. Many things that Jesus referred to before his death were spoken in the context of the Old Testament, which at that stage had not yet lost its power. The purpose of this writing is to show all the important changes that took place when the New Testament took effect.

A Physical Demonstration of the Start of the New Testament

Throughout the Bible we see how God explains and illustrates spiritual realities and truths by means of physical demonstrations. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul explains the symbolic meaning of the water that flowed from the rock that was struck by Moses, as referred to in Exodus 17. He explains that the rock was Christ. In John 3 Jesus also makes use of Old Testament symbolism to explain a spiritual principle to Nicodemus; just like the snake was lifted up in the desert (Numbers 21:8, 9), so the Son of Man had to be lifted up on the cross so that all who put their faith in Him could be saved.

Many more examples could be cited. The most significant symbolic incident mentioned in the Bible takes place at the exact moment of the death of Jesus on the cross – the veil dividing the most holy place from the rest of the Jewish temple, tears in two, from top to bottom! It was behind this veil that God manifested His presence to the high priest in the Old Testament.

Just before his death Jesus uttered: “*It is finished.*” These words implied that the mission that had brought him to earth, had been completed. The full meaning of this completed task is symbolically illustrated by the tearing of the veil. The implication of this symbolic event is so far reaching that it divides the Bible into two sections, the Old and the New Testaments. The tearing of the veil was a Divine sign announcing symbolically the start of a new era, a totally new dispensation. The Amplified Bible states it like this: “*By this the Holy Spirit points out that the way into the true Holy of Holies is not yet thrown open as long as the former (the outer portion of the) tabernacle remains a recognised institution and is still standing. Seeing that the first outer portion of the tabernacle was a parable – a visible symbol or type or picture of the present age...For the ceremonies deal only with clean and unclean meats and drinks and different washings, mere external rules and regulations for the body imposed to tide the worshippers over until the time of setting things straight – of reformation, of the complete new order when Christ, the Messiah, shall establish the reality of what these things foreshadow, a better covenant*” (Hebrews 9:8-10).

Thus the division of the two different dispensations in the Bible does not lie between the end of Malachi and the beginning of the Book of Matthew, but at the exact moment of the tearing of the veil in the Jewish temple, coinciding with the moment of Christ’s death on the cross (Matthew 27:50-51).

Without a complete understanding of this symbolic message from God that day in the temple (remember it was torn from top to bottom), one cannot fully appreciate the new dispensation of the New Testament that it inaugurated. Unfortunately many Christians are not fully experiencing the benefits of this “*complete new order*” because of so many concepts and practices that do not have their roots in the New Testament, but are carried over from the Old Covenant or are based on the traditions of men.

Because the importance of this event is not adequately emphasised, many do not realise how radically it should influence our traditional concept of church life. **In fact, if the tearing of the veil and what it stands for does not form the centre of your theology, it is difficult to understand how you can interpret the Bible properly!**

2

THE MESSAGE OF THE TEARING OF THE VEIL

1. A New Way into the Presence of the Father

In the Old Testament only the high priest could approach God directly in the most holy section of the temple, beyond the veil. This he could do once a year to make atonement for sin on behalf of the people. They, the ordinary people, could not approach God directly. They had to do it through their representative, the high priest.

The tearing of the veil symbolises the Lord Jesus Christ's body, torn on the cross to open the way to the presence of the Father through His once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:20). It also emphasises a very important aspect of Christ's death; never again will any other form of mediation, other than Christ Himself, be needed between the presence of God and the believer (Hebrews 7:25). Unfortunately, because of certain traditions and unbiblical practices, many believers are not enjoying this privilege.

One of the early theologians, Augustine, declared that there was no salvation but through the Church institution. The historian C.S. Wegener describes in his book, Die Kirche Lebt, how at one stage during the Middle Ages, people were forced to join the Roman Catholic Church in order to be "saved". Many of the reformers during the Reformation were monks

and priests who came out of this religious institution which has been called “The Mother of Church Tradition.” Although they succeeded in restoring some important Biblical truths, they failed to implement the logical step of removing the institution with its priestly figures as a form of mediation between God and man. Many today still measure their service to God in terms of their commitment to a religious institution or system. To confirm this point we refer to what a well-known American teacher, Bob Yandian, writes in his book Decently and in order – A Guide to New Testament Government. He says that God communicates and speaks to the leader of the congregation, who is the pastor, and tells him what the members should hear (p.31). He further goes on to state that in the way the vision and direction of the pastor is followed, is ultimately how the Lord is followed (p.42)! This type of thinking robs believers of their dearly bought inheritance, including sharing a spiritual gift with the rest of the body as a New Testament priest. Neither does it consider the full symbolic meaning of the tearing of the veil. What God tore apart, man sews up again!

It is important to bear in mind that being committed to a religious institution does not necessarily imply that one is serving God by being committed to His Word! Often personal life-style, faith, integrity, commitment to Biblical truth, friendship and fellowship, seem to play a secondary role. So much of what passes as fellowship is too often determined by “belonging” to the same religious denomination or institution. Subtly, the institution has once again been placed between God and man, and between man and man! Much tension and division is caused by this traditional concept of having to join and “belong” to an institution. Many instances can be quoted of fellowships, families and friendships that have been torn apart because of this unbiblical tradition. This emphasis on

institutionalism has been one of the major factors that has contributed to the church's shocking history of division. Congregationalism can be seen throughout the New Testament, but never in the context of coming in between the individual believer and the Father, or causing division between believers.

Nearly two thousand years ago Paul had to rebuke the New Testament Christians for displaying a divisive sectarian spirit which he picked up through their terminology: "*I belong to Paul*", "*I belong to Apollos*", "*I belong to Cefas*" (1 Corinthians 1:12, 1 Corinthians 3:3-5). Imagine what his reaction would be today to all the "*I belong to's*", reflecting the importance some groups place on membership.

Listen to what Paul had to say about this emphasis: "*For you are still unspiritual, having the nature of the flesh – under the control of ordinary impulses. For as long as there are envying and jealousy and wrangling and factions among you, are you not unspiritual and of the flesh, behaving yourselves after a human standard and like mere unchanged men? For when one says, I belong to Paul, and another, I belong to Apollos, are you not proving yourselves ordinary unchanged men? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Ministering servants, not heads of parties...*" (1 Corinthians 3:3-5).

It is amazing that, in spite of the clear instruction of the apostle Paul concerning this matter of "belonging to", so little is done to speak out against this sinful state of division that is pervasive in such a well organised way in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that all the chapters of 1 Corinthians provide good sermon material for preachers – think of how much attention especially chapter thirteen, the love chapter, enjoys – but the verses in chapter three rebuking the sectarian spirit which expresses itself in "*I belong to*" are hardly ever touched!

Fellowshipping in congregational context is a great privilege, but that is all that it is, an instrument of grace. Many saints of the past had to do without it. Think of those in prisons, persecuted for their faith, and of those living in countries where it is against the law to gather openly as Christians. Think of those in isolated mission fields.

What to do to rectify this sad state of organised division in the church is a matter for each one's own conscience. Not one of us is responsible for what has developed in the church over the last few hundred years, but we can be assured that one day, each one of us will be held accountable for our own attitudes and convictions about this matter.

2. "You Don't Go to Church; You Go to Meetings"

Another very important aspect of the new dispensation of the New Testament, as demonstrated by the tearing of the veil, is the removal of the emphasis of the role that the place of worship plays.

In the Old Testament the temple building formed the centre around which Jewish religious activities revolved. The place was of great importance. However, from a "beyond the torn veil" perspective, this emphasis becomes of minor importance. Unfortunately, once again because of the strength of some traditional ideas, the place of worship remains a holy cow. Thus the Samaritan woman's problem concerning the place of worship is still a common problem today. She confronts Jesus with: "*Sir, ...our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.*" She has a problem about attending the right place of worship. Does this sound familiar? What was his answer to settle her problem? Jesus said: "*Believe me woman; a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this*

*mountain nor in Jerusalem...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in **spirit and truth**, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks”* (John 4:21-24, emphasis mine).

In the new dispensation we are taught that our bodies become the temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19). The word that Jesus used for “church” in Matthew 16:18 is the word *ekklesia* which means “called out ones” and refers to all born again believers all over the world. The New Testament church is not a building or an organisation, it is a walking, talking, living organism made up of individual believers filled with the spirit of God, called the body of Christ. **You cannot join it, you can only be born into it spiritually. Neither can you resign from it; it is a spiritual reality, determined so by the will of God.**

Once I took my family to show them a beautiful cathedral in Pietermaritzburg. We admired the intricate stonework, the old rafters, beams and other woodwork. We were all fascinated by the famous round stained window in the western wall. As we exited, we stepped aside just inside the heavy old doors so that another sight-seeing group could enter. All the men wore supporter caps and hats for a sports event that was going to take place later that day. They all greeted politely as they passed me. As they stepped over the threshold to enter, they all very reverently and respectfully took off their hats and caps. Then it suddenly struck me. They pass me, the walking, talking, living temple of the Holy Spirit, as the Bible calls every believer, greet me politely, yet not one lifts his hat to me, but what a show of respect the moment they step inside the building made out of stone and cement – hats are taken off and voices drop to hushed tones. I could not help having a Bible study right there with my family members!

This story illustrates the big difference between how the church is seen by those who have a perspective of beyond the torn veil and how it is seen by those who have a traditional view of it. From a New Testament point of view, belonging to anything other than Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, loses importance. In the new dispensation, fellowship and friendship, not membership, has taken on a new meaning.

When we look at the history of the church during the first few centuries, it seems that the early believers understood the church to be, not an institution, **but a spontaneous association of believers who formed an alternative society.** Although they got together in different congregations, in different locations, Paul and other writers of the epistles recognised that there was only one church. This is confirmed by the way in which Paul addresses his letter to the Roman Christians; “*To all in Rome...*” (Romans 1:7). His letter to the Christians in Corinth is addressed to “*the church of God in Corinth.*” This seems to be the pattern. History tells us that at that stage there were many Christians in cities like Rome and Corinth. It is very unlikely that they could all come together in one place. Although they must have fellowshiped in different congregations, in different localities, one letter was addressed to them all. The fact that Paul understood the church to be people, is confirmed in the way he sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila: “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila... Greet also the church that meets at their house...*” (Romans 16:3-5).

Believers don't go to church, the church meets!

Imagine Paul having to write a letter to the church in Matatiele in our time! If he had to respect the different doctrines and attitudes in all the different denominations, it would be impossible for him to do so in one letter!

Another factor that causes much unhappiness and eventually leads to division between members of the body of Christ is the fact that many religious groups formulate their doctrines and then write them down in the cement of their constitutions or in their statements of belief. These documents have so much authority that few dare to question them. The danger also exists of one being branded a rebel and being ostracised if one should dare to differ! Of this many believers have firsthand experience. Because of rigid structures, very few institutions can allow debate or difference of opinion. One wonders in what measure the principles of the New Testament can be implemented in a traditional model of the church? Here one is reminded of the words of Jesus: *“Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved”* (Matthew 9:17). It has been seen over and over: **rigid religious structures just cannot allow healthy discussion concerning what is plainly written and instructed in the Word of God.** The whole thing will tear apart.

Many sincere believers plead and pray for the unity of the church. I know of a gathering where up to twenty five thousand Christians of different denominational backgrounds were brought together to pray for unity. What a laudible effort! But how many have the courage of their convictions to do something about the so many unbiblical practices, structures and beliefs that cause the disunity in the first place. Where does the responsibility of the believer lie? To be faithful to Biblical truth or to sacrifice it for the sake of unity? The Bible declares that the church should be a pillar and foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Compare this statement with the lackadaisical attitude many believers have towards what they believe!

I agree with what A.W. Tozer says: *“The face of God shines down on us, but we allow the clouds to form. Clouds of stubborn pride, self-will, ambition, etc. Then there is the matter of presumption. Some Christians recognise that the cloud is there – so they presume that they can fast and pray through this kind of cloud – just another form of stubbornness. We have no word from God indicating long prayers will make everything right. Genuine prayer is still soul’s sincere desire and God still answers. But we must give up this idea that we can hang on to those things that bring the cloud and still be able to pray the cloud away. You cannot do it!”*

3. A New Testament Priesthood and a Change of Law

In the Old Testament there were three anointed ministries or offices; that of king, prophet and priest. Only men from the tribe of Levi could do duty as priests. The Levitical priesthood also acted as the government of Israel. Initially it was never God’s will that His people should be ruled by kings, but the Israelites chose to copy the pattern of the heathen tribes around them. They rejected God’s way and paid dearly for it (1 Samuel 8). The Levitical priesthood and the Old Testament system of religion (the way in which the priests had to be cared for, the different types of sacrifices, the rituals and the feasts) was regulated by Old Testament law.

In the new dispensation, a change took place in the priestly order. Jesus, our New Testament High Priest, was not a Levite, because He descended from the tribe of Judah. This change of priesthood is confirmed by what is stated in Hebrews 7:11: *“If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood...., why was there need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?”*

The Bible then makes a very important statement: “*For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a **change of law***” (Hebrews 7:12, emphasis mine). We have already explained that the Levitical priesthood, stemming from the high priest Aaron, was regulated by the Old Testament law that was given to Moses. Because of the change of priesthood, this old system of law was therefore no longer applicable. It is amazing how, in spite of this clear teaching from the Word of God, Old Testament laws concerning the old priesthood are still commonly used as rules in the New Testament church! The copying of the role model of the priest as well as tithing are typical examples. When speaking about Old Testament law, there is, however, a need to differentiate between ceremonial law and the moral law of God.

The **ceremonial laws** covered all the different types of sacrificial offerings for the atonement for sin, as set out in the Book of Leviticus. They were of course, all types of the New Testament Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who fulfilled and replaced them. Importantly, all the old laws regulating the Levitical priesthood, its system of support and all the different types of sacrifices, fell away following the introduction of the new priesthood. As stated earlier, many who have not come to terms with the change of priesthood that took place, still copy and apply certain practices which were only applicable to the old dispensation.

The **moral law** is summarised in the Ten Commandments which were given to Israel. Note, however, that not a single principle found in the Old Testament moral law, is contradicted by the teachings of Jesus or the apostles. Furthermore, when reading the New Testament, we find that the moral requirements of its teachings are of a much higher standard than those expressed in the Ten Commandments or any other place in the Old Testament. Excerpts from the

teachings of Jesus can be used as examples; we will just give two: *“You have heard it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery’. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matthew 5:27-28). Here Jesus quotes the law from the Ten Commandments as found in Exodus 20:14 and then gives the New Testament standard. He does the same with the old law which says, *“an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”*. (Exodus 21:24). He replaces this with: *“Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”* (Matthew 5:38-39).

The fact that the difference between the Old Testament system of religion and that of the New Testament is not properly understood leads to, as stated earlier, the application of Old Testament rules and laws in the church, which keep people in spiritual bondage. Paul warns of the dangerous implications of doing this by using the Jews as an example. *“But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away”* (2 Corinthians 3:14). **Mixing the old with the new has serious implications; the understanding of New Testament truth is made dull.** It also prevents believers from fully experiencing the blessings of the freedom of New Testament worship.

4. Priestly Figures

The status that the all-in-one pastor/minister-figure enjoys in most congregations does not rest on New Testament revelation, but on the role model of the Old Testament priest. The word “pastor” in the Bible merely means to be a shepherd, someone who cares for the sheep. It is mentioned in the same line and breath as apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers

(Ephesians 4:11). On what grounds is the pastoral ministry elevated above the rest, given special perks and privileges and put in charge of the flock? This situation contributes to producing a priestly class in the church by dividing the Body of Christ into two classes: the clergy and the laity and this leads to the wrong impression that only the clergy are “full-time” in the service of the Lord. This concept contributes largely to the neutralising of the ministering power of the New Testament priesthood of all believers.

In the New Testament we read that in the new dispensation, the Holy Spirit is poured out on **all** believers. Thus, in contrast to the old dispensation, **all believers now become God’s anointed ones**. The Holy Spirit wants to distribute spiritual gifts and ministries amongst His Body, for the benefit of all. Thus the ministry of the New Testament priesthood is experienced as every member functions. In the New Testament, in contrast to the old, we read of men and women, from all ranks of society, under unction of the Holy Spirit, becoming witnesses and ministers in the service of God (1 Corinthians 12/14).

How did it happen that this professional position of pastor/minister could become the centre around which so many congregations revolve? Again we have to go back to “The Mother of Church Tradition”. The reformers of Luther’s day questioned and changed many aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine, but much of their concept of the model of the church and the practise of the ministry evolved out of Catholic tradition. Interestingly, Luther expressed his frustration because he could not find enough suitable men off the street to introduce the open ministry of the New Testament priesthood of all believers. Rather, he had to make use of the many ex-priests and monks that had just come out of the Roman Catholic Church. So instead of introducing New Testament

principles, they continued ministering according to the traditions of the institution that they had just come out of. They had to do all the work of the ministry and so the model of the priest was carried into the Reformation. James H. Rutz says in his book, The Open Church: “Today’s version of Protestantism rests on the concept and practice of the pastor, but he exists nowhere in the New Testament Scripture. Yet ironically, he’s the fellow we hire and put in the pulpit to call us to be faithful to the Bible! O consistency, where are thy children?”

The real tragedy of this tradition is that it prevents the development of spiritual gifts and ministries in the lives of many believers, keeping them in an eternal state of spiritual nappyhood.

The Bible teaches that “...*He gave gifts to men...some apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...*” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

In another place the Word says that He has made us to be “a kingdom of priests to serve” (Revelations 1:6).

Experience shows that it is just not possible for these gifted ministries to be developed in the classroom environment of a Bible school. They need to develop through discipleship in the school of the Spirit, which is life itself, and then they have to find expression in the fellowship of believers through open ministry, for the benefit and the building up of the Body.

While talking about the ministries of the New Testament church, it is now appropriate to consider the well-known and often abused expression “Do not touch God’s anointed ones.”

5. “Do not touch God’s anointed ones”

These words are often given as warnings when the traditional pastor or minister is criticised. Because of this traditional mindset of esteeming them as “God’s anointed ones”, they are given a position and a status which is far above the rest of the congregation. Mixed with the subjective terminology “God told me” and “God showed me”, and sometimes even “I, the Lord, say unto you”, so often used in preaching and teaching, we have the ingredients for serious spiritual abuse.

Where does the expression “Do not touch God’s anointed ones” come from? It comes from Psalm 105:15, in the Old Testament. Here we have another good example of the result of not understanding the difference between the two dispensations in the Bible.

In the context of the Old Testament the expression “*My anointed ones*”, refers directly to the Old Testament ministries of prophets and priests. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find teaching that gives anybody the right to equate the modern pastor/minister-figure with the Old Testament prophet or priest. If one does want to talk about “*anointed ones*” in the context of the New Testament, we have to include all believers, because the Holy Spirit was poured out on everybody present in the upper-room as described in Acts 2. The apostle John explains that: “*As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you...*” confirming that all New Testament believers are “*anointed ones*” (1 John 2:27).

This popular wrong opinion that the pastors and ministers are God’s “*anointed ones*” is expressed in a book that we have already referred to. Although it claims to be a guide to New Testament church government, it goes on to draw its examples from the Old Testament! On page 18 of Decently and in order – A Guide to New Testament Church Government, the writer

states that according to God's Word it is His choice to have one man who hears Him and who rules over the church. He then refers to Moses and the kings of Israel as examples to support his point of view!

This type of teaching begs us to take another look at what the New Testament really teaches about authority, submission and covering.

3

**AUTHORITY, SUBMISSION AND
COVERING IN A PERSPECTIVE
FROM
BEYOND THE TORN VEIL**

In studying the origins of denominations one finds that most started off as groups that had broken away from older established groups. Today there are thousands of them around the world, each one a system of authority unto themselves. One wonders where they got the authority from to break away from authority, and under whose authority they were during the time it took them to institutionalise and become their own authority? Out of the Charismatic, Restoration and Renewal Moves of recent times, many streams have emerged, each providing “covering” for its adherents.

What has now become apparent and too widespread to be ignored, is the large number of believers, who, for some reason or another, have become estranged from their institutions, and are accused of not being under authority and covering anymore. Some, in order to comply, have gone around looking for something else to join and to belong to, but often have found, to their disillusionment, the same circumstances that had caused their unhappiness in the first place. Others in pursuit of change, have decided to come together independently in homes or halls, only to find that

because no real change had taken place in terms of their theology and the model of the church they have in mind, the only thing that had changed was the geographical location of the meeting – where they once got together in a big meeting, they now get together in a small meeting, with the same old traditional church spirit dictating what goes on.

The result of all this is that many sincere believers have ended up in isolation and disillusionment. Many harbour feelings of condemnation because of their inability to conform to the popular pattern as found in most church circles around them. We have found that these particular believers are the most susceptible to New Testament truth. In fact, one wonders if this situation of so many unchurched believers all over the world is perhaps not the doing of the Spirit of God? Perhaps God is setting apart a people for a time in which false prophets will lead many astray and for the sake of a false unity Biblical truth will be compromised to make place for a doctrinal fruit-salad that will be able to accommodate people of all persuasions and beliefs. The Word of God clearly warns us that *“in latter times some will turn away from the faith, giving attention to deluding spirits and doctrines...”* (1 Timothy 4:1, Amplified Bible). The Bible also predicts that a time is coming when people will not want to listen to sound doctrine, but because of their itching ears *“will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold ”* (2 Timothy 4:3, Amplified Bible).

Another practice that has been the cause of much discomfort in the church is the use of a type of terminology in which the Name of the Lord is invoked in a very loose way. Phrases like: “God told me”, “God showed me” and “God spoke to me”, are commonly heard. In some cases it sounds as if it is God

Himself who is speaking! – “I, the Lord your God says unto you...”

We want to emphasise that in our discussions, it is neither integrity nor good intentions that are questioned, just theology.

6. Failure to Adhere to Paul’s Principle of Ministry

“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said” (1 Corinthians 14:29).

The question that needs to be answered here is this: How can this instruction of Paul be implemented if the speaker starts off each sentence with “God said”, “God told me”, “God showed me?” Sometimes, especially in prophesying, words are used as if it is God speaking directly to the people. One cannot judge and evaluate what God says! Yet Paul instructs that speakers have to be evaluated by the hearers. How can this be done if such a terminology is used? Paul places the responsibility for discerning whether a spoken word is inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the ear of the hearer, not on the tongue of the speaker. The possibility of being manipulated by people who speak in the name of the Lord, makes the application of this principle of the utmost importance.

In order to implement Biblical directions in this matter, speakers need to change their terminology and not invoke the Name of the Lord in everything they say. What is questioned here is not whether God still communicates with His people, but whether what is spoken is inspired or not. **It is only in quoting the written Word of God that one can say, without reservation, “Thus says the Lord.”**

What are the implications of this loose terminology in which the Name of our God is so abused? How can you advise somebody if he boldly proclaims that God told him to do

something? The principle of finding wisdom in many counsellors is being neutralised! The use of this type of terminology represents a certain type of subjective theology that places a dangerous emphasis on the importance of inner impressions; this weakens the authority of the written Word of God. For example, it often happens that sincere preachers wait on God in prayer and fasting, and because of their enthusiasm, they listen to their own inner impressions and interpret them as the voice of the Holy Spirit. They then appear in their pulpits and the audiences get the impression that it is God speaking. This creates a predicament. Any difference of opinion might now be seen as being disobedient to what God has said and so the preacher has now painted himself into a corner. How does he back off without losing face! This approach naturally plays havoc with relationships and the consequences are sometimes devastating. A spirit of control over the people is often a direct result of this type of subjectivity. How can you differ from something that is declared to come from God? Discussion is made impossible and it takes great moral courage for a leader to apologise and admit that he was wrong.

An honest evaluation will show that the success rate of things done in response to this “voice” is too shockingly low to allow it to continue uncontested. In fact, the failures far outweigh the things that seem to work out. The “hits” become enthusiastic testimonies in meetings, whilst the “misses” are conveniently ignored. We can produce files full of case studies to prove the point. Many, who are subjected to this, eventually become disillusioned, sceptical and leave the fellowship. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why some churches have such a high rate of turnover in their membership.

How do we allow for inspired ministry through the body?

Believers should be encouraged to share what is on their mind, but should be taught to avoid the type of terminology that declares that it comes directly from God. As Paul instructs, it should be left to the hearers to discern whether what is shared, is in fact inspired.

As in the church in Ephesus, believers should test and evaluate what is going on around them. For this they were complimented by the Lord: *“I know your deeds...that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false”* (Revelation 2:2). Even in the Old Testament, prophets were to be judged and if things they prophesied did not come true, they had to be stoned (Deuteronomy 18). This underlines that it is a very serious thing to say things in the Name of the Lord. Jesus taught that a person will one day have to give an account of every careless word that he has spoken (Matthew 12:36). How much more so for careless words spoken in His Name!

Neglecting to judge what speakers say, as the Bible instructs in 1 Corinthians 14:29, is the main reason why some groups end up with the cultish trait of being ruled and manipulated by a few strong characters who maintain that they are hearing from God. Surely, a good place to start “hearing” from God is to apply the written instructions found in His Word!

Authority and Submission

We often hear it being said that you can prove anything from the Bible. This is not true! It cannot be done if you take the Bible as a whole and allow scripture to explain scripture. One must remember that no part of the Bible can contradict another part of it. Furthermore, it is incorrect to build doctrines on

isolated passages, especially when they are obscure and difficult to understand. Everything must be viewed and interpreted in harmony with what is plainly and clearly stated in Scripture.

Another important principle of Bible exposition that has to be taken into consideration is whether what is being read is written before or after the tearing of the veil; in other words, before or after the inauguration of the New Testament. In terms of authority and submission in the Body of Christ, this approach ensures a clearer and wider perspective on God's purposes. One of the most important references of Jesus to the issue of authority makes us realise that New Testament authority is the exact opposite of our traditional understanding of it. His explanation helps us to understand what New Testament authority should not be like. This in turn helps us recognise the real thing. When the mother of Zebedee's sons asked Jesus whether they could sit in positions of authority, his answer was: "*You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you.** Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave*" (Matthew 20:25-27, emphasis mine). From this passage it is very clear that authority in the church of Jesus Christ may not be exercised in a way which is common to any secular, worldly organisation.

In his book *Life Together* Dietrich Bonhoeffer says the following about New Testament authority: "*Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service. Genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is carried out. Every cult of personality that emphasises the distinguished qualities, virtues, and talents of another person, even though these be altogether spiritual of nature, is worldly*

and has no place in the Christian community; indeed it poisons the Christian community. The desire we so often hear expressed today for ‘episcopal figures’, ‘priestly men’, ‘authoritative personalities’, springs frequently enough from a spiritually sick need for the admiration of men, for the establishment of visible human authority, because a genuine authority of service appears to be so unimpressive. There is nothing that so sharply contradicts such a desire as the New Testament itself in its description of a bishop (1 Tim.3:1). The bishop is the simple, faithful man, sound in faith and life, who rightly discharges his duties to the church. In the man himself there is nothing to admire. Ultimately, this hankering for false authority has at its root a desire to re-establish some sort of immediacy, a dependence upon human beings in the church. Genuine authority knows that is bound in the strictest sense by the saying of Jesus: ‘One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren’” (Matthew 23:8).

The Difference between Organised Institutional Authority and Recognised Authority

The type of authority that the New Testament talks about is rooted in the family. The way in which a man treats his family will ultimately be the way in which he will treat the family of God. *“If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?”* (1 Timothy 3:5).

The shocking fact of so many men and women in leadership betraying their spouses, which so often leads to divorce, is proof of the fact that New Testament authority is little understood. Commitment is a spiritual principle that over-rides any emotional and sensual sensations!

Spiritual authority is not something that is imposed on a person from the outside; it is something that grows from the

inside and can be recognised in a person in terms of the development of spiritual qualities in his character. This development is recognised by other people and they voluntarily go to him for advice and counsel. Institutional authority, is on the other hand, vested in a position to which a person gets appointed. This situation often creates a lot of tension, because sometimes men of spiritual maturity have to sit and listen to others who, because of their age and lack of experience, are still immature and lack real spiritual authority. Because spiritual authority has to be recognised, it is logical that leadership should grow out of discipleship. By being in fellowship over an extended period of time, people get to know one another well. This is a principle that plays a very important role in spiritual authority. The early church recognised this, thus when they had to choose deacons to do the practical work, they were instructed to choose men who were well known to the Christian community (Acts 6:3). If this was their standard for deacons who only had to be responsible for the distribution of food, how much more is it applicable to men who have to preach, teach and give spiritual guidance?

Leadership in the Body of Christ has nothing to do with positions or titles. In fact, the esteem given to titles in some circles contradicts the spirit of New Testament teaching. Jesus told His disciples that they were not to be called “Rabbi”, for He said that they had only one Master and that they were all brothers (Matthew 23:8-10).

One wonders how much authority the Word of God has in the practical arrangements we find in the church when such clear, simple instructions are totally ignored?

Spiritual Submission

One cannot have a proper understanding of New Testament authority unless one looks at the example set by Jesus. He said: “...*learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart*” (Matthew 11:29). He also said: “*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. No servant is greater than his master...*” (John 13:13-16).

The verse that is often quoted to defend and explain why believers should submit to a hierarchy of organisational authority is “*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority*” (Hebrews 13:7). Here we find a good example of where an isolated text, used out of context, has become a pretext. This statement is balanced and placed within the New Testament framework of authority by verse seven of the same chapter, which reads: “*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*” The Greek word for “consider” is *anatheoreo* which Zodhiates translates as “*to look again at (i.e. attentively at).*” Against the wider background of the New Testament it becomes clear that submission and authority are always used in the context of spiritual development – to help people become more Christ-like – to lead and instruct by example. This is confirmed by scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 10:8: “*...the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down.*” The authority that Paul exerted was governed by the example set by Christ – “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The setting is spiritual growth, not organisational order!

The only thing that makes all activity in the body of Christ meaningful, (including meetings, ministry and fellowship) is that **opportunities are created for the growth of character.** Around this goal everything should revolve. In Ephesians 4:11-16 we read that God gave various gifts of ministry to his church for the sole purpose of building up the body “...attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Another factor which influences our perception of authority is the model of the church that we have in mind. When the church is seen and run like an organisation, with authoritarian flow charts and the like, the only way in which things can run smoothly is by demanding submission to its structure. The corporation model of the church can not allow free thinking, with robot-like commitment being necessary for the success of the vision of the leadership.

This abuse of authority in the church has placed many believers in a cultish type of bondage. In many cases much harm has been caused in terms of broken relationships, because the authority of the structure counted more than the bonds of friendship.

Listen to the warning given in Scripture against the wrong use of authority: “*For you endure it if a man assumes control of your souls and makes slaves of you, or devours your substance, spends your money and preys upon you, or deceives and takes advantage of you, or is arrogant and puts on airs, or strikes you in the face*” (2 Corinthians 11:20 Amplified Bible).

The tone set by the teachings of Jesus and the whole atmosphere of New Testament Christianity indicates that scriptures like: “*Honour one another above yourselves*” (Romans 12:10), “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*” (Ephesians 5:21), are applicable to all believers, leaders included. Where the attitude of submitting to one another is not present, especially amongst leaders (who are

supposed to be setting a spiritual example), one can be assured of much deception creeping in, for then the Biblical covering of humbleness, which is so essential for receiving correction, is absent.

This brings us to the subject of “covering”.

Covering in perspective

“Clothe (apron) yourselves, all of you, with humility – as the garb of a servant, so that its covering cannot possibly be stripped from you, with freedom from pride and arrogance...”
(1 Peter 5:5, Amplified Bible).

Christians who do not belong to recognised institutions are often accused of not being under “covering”. Even amongst freer groups one hears of having to “relate” to something or somebody, even if, as in some cases, the covering body is thousands of kilometres away overseas. In this context it is interesting that the first question that one is usually asked when introduced to another Christian is: “Which church do you belong to?” or “Who do you relate to?”

Where does this idea of having to belong to an institution in order to have covering come from? A superficial reading of God’s Word will clearly show that Paul openly rebuked this type of mentality of “belonging to”. Writing to the Corinthians he addresses one of the causes of division in the church: one said he followed Paul, another said he followed Cephas, another followed Apollos. Paul wanted to know whether Christ was divided. *“Who then is Apollos?” “What is Paul?”* – He answers his own question; *“They are ministering servants, not heads of parties...!”* (1 Corinthians 1:12-13, 1 Corinthians 3:3-5, Amplified Bible). If this was his reaction towards men of the calibre of the early apostles, imagine what his reaction

would have been towards the modern tendency to elevate leaders and allow them to build up huge empires which cost the people millions. The Word of God is so clear about this: “*So let no one exult proudly concerning men, boasting of having this or that man as leader*” (1 Corinthians 3:21, Amplified Bible).

Real spiritual covering is provided by being in relationship with believers with whom you can share your heart. They should have the liberty of speaking correction into your life (James 5:16).

Listen to what Jesus had to say about friendship: “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you my servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends...*” (John 15:13-15).

Often believers are reluctant to voice their frustrations out of fear of being accused of being rebellious. The result is that they live behind fronts and no intimate relationships exist between them and those in leadership. They often find more intimate fellowship with believers outside their formal circles. Spiritual covering is built into the principle of submitting oneself to listening, and evaluating the opinion and criticism of other brothers and sisters. The final criteria must of course be the Word of God. Ultimately each one will have to stand before God to give an account of himself for what he did and believed (Romans 14:10-12).

In the Book of Hebrews the Judiazers are warned against the practice of building a system of religion by indiscriminately mixing parts from both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible clearly explains that the “*outer portion of the tabernacle was a parable – visible symbol or type or picture of the present age*” (Hebrews 9:9, Amplified Bible). The tabernacle

and its Levitical priesthood, with all its rituals and rules, was part of the ceremonial law, which for the Christian, was replaced by the Reality for which it stood, Jesus Christ. This external system of religion was meant to last only *“until the time for setting things straight – reformation, of the complete new order when Christ, the Messiah, shall establish the reality of what these things foreshadow, a better covenant”* (Hebrews 9:10, Amplified Bible). In the new dispensation all believers can now come directly into the presence of God, without any form of mediation or covering, through *“this fresh, new and living way which He initiated and dedicated and opened for us through separating the curtain (veil of the Holy of Holies), that is, through His flesh”* (Hebrews 10:20, Amplified Bible). After the tearing of the veil, a religious institution with priestly figures mediating between God and man was no longer necessary.

A warning to those who are guilty of doing exactly what the Judaizers were doing: serving a religious system in which parts from the Old Covenant have been brought over into the church. The Amplified Bible warns *“that the way into the true Holy of Holies is not yet thrown open as long as the former, the outer portion of the tabernacle, remains a recognised institution and is still standing”* (Hebrews 9:8).

For many, the church as an institution, has become an end in itself, and is no longer a means to an end. This is especially true of churches where sacramental rites are regarded as having some inherent power to save – a virtually automatic means of salvation! One frequently gets the impression that christening and confirmation is regarded in this way. To take this view substitutes the church for the Lord of the church. For others, their support and commitment to the institution has become a way through which they think they can invoke the blessings of God. Thus their religious organisation has become

a great sacramental idol. The church, if properly understood, is an instrument of grace, but it is a means to an end, not an end in itself; it should be a means to strengthen personal faith in Christ alone and to bring believers to spiritual maturity.

4

TITHING AS SEEN FROM BEYOND THE TORN VEIL

I believe that the first requirement for understanding and applying the Bible correctly, is to understand the implications of the radical difference between the New and the Old Testaments. Tithing, where taught and practised as a law or rule unto the church, best illustrates this lack of understanding the difference between these two Testaments.

Bernard Ramm says in his book, Protestant Biblical Interpretation: *“That God has spoken in Holy Scriptures is the very heart of our faith and without this certainty we should be left to the relativity and dubiousness of human knowledge. God has spoken! But what has He said?”* He goes on and quotes from Edward White’s book, Inspiration: *“There is no folly, no God-dishonouring theology, no iniquity, no sacerdotal puerility for which chapter and verse may not be cited by an enslaved intelligence. And under these circumstances it is impossible to express in adequate terms the importance of correct estimate and exposition of the Bible.”* (Emphasis mine).

The tithing doctrine is a very good example of the erroneous exposition and application of the Old Testament in the New Testament church. Because of the heavy emphasis placed on it in some circles, it is necessary to take a closer look at some of the teachings on this subject.

Evaluating the traditional tithing teaching

In short this teaching states that one tenth of my income **has** to be given to God and that nine tenths belongs to me. Let us look at some of the most important passages and arguments used as basis for this teaching.

1. Malachi 3:8-11

This passage in which the prophet Malachi rebukes Israel for robbing God by not bringing the tithes and offerings to the storehouse, is the passage that is most commonly used to motivate tithing as a rule in the church. It is instructive to consider other issues dealt with in the Book of Malachi. In chapter one the sacrifice of food and animals as offerings is mentioned. In chapter two the continuance of the covenant with Levi, the high priest is dealt with. Chapter three discusses tithes and offerings. In chapter four the whole law and the decrees given to Moses are mentioned and the people instructed to obey them all. The Book of Malachi was written as a whole! Now the question is asked: Which principle of Bible exposition is used to specifically select one verse, Malachi 3:10 out of the fifty five verses of this book, and prescribe it as a rule for the church? If such a principle cannot be given, what prevents a person from introducing any of the other things mentioned, quote the applicable verse, and place it as a law on the church? The same is then true for any other part of the Old Testament.

In the same way that Malachi 3:10 has been imposed on the church, the following has also, in some circles, been interpreted as the “will” of God for today: because polygamy was allowed in the Bible, it may be practised in the church and because the Bible declares that certain plagues came from

God, methods of sanitation may not be applied to destroy them. Some also believe that because certain statements are made about childbirth, methods to alleviate pain may not be applied. So the list can be extended. The application of sound principles of Bible exposition would have prevented all this confusion!

In the context of tithing, it should be noted that in the light of the teachings of the New Testament, a parallel cannot be drawn between the “storehouse” of the Old Testament and the modern religious institution. The Old Testament storehouse was the physical stone temple in Jerusalem, whilst, under the New Testament, all believers, individually and corporately, form the new temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). If this principle of bringing the tithes to the storehouse, which is supposed to be the church, is to be applied correctly according to New Testament revelation, then the money has to be divided amongst the members of the body, for they make up the church!

Furthermore, the clergy of today cannot be equated with the Levitical priestly class of the Old Testament, because Hebrews 7:11-12 explicitly states: *“If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? **For when there is a change in the priesthood there must also be a change of the law .”*** (Emphasis mine).

According to the teachings found in the New Testament, each and every believer is now a priest and a king unto God (1 Peter 2:5). Nowhere in any of the writings of the New Testament can a new law be found that instructs tithes to be paid to this new priesthood.

2. Genesis 14:20

Another argument that is presented to support the tithing doctrine comes from Genesis 14:20 where Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of “*everything*”, and because Melchizedek is a type of Christ, so the reasoning goes, we must tithe to the church, which is his representative. Hebrews chapter seven explains what the “*everything*” was. In verse four we read that Abraham “*gave him a tenth of the plunder.*” Genesis 14 gives the background of this event. Abraham attacked five heathen kings and of the plunder taken from them, he gave a tenth. What principle can be deduced from this incident that can be applied to the church? – attack some unbeliever you consider your enemy, take things away from him and give a tenth of it to the church?

We don’t read that Abraham ever did this to Melchizedek again. He did it only once in his lifetime. How can you use an isolated incident in the Old Testament as a basis for a doctrine for the church?

Some want to make something of the fact that tithing is mentioned in Hebrews chapter seven. A careful study of this chapter will show that the emphasis is on a comparison of priesthoods, not on any teaching concerning instructions for tithing in the church. It is not sound Bible exposition to build doctrines on obscure passages, whilst the ones that are very clear on the subject, are ignored.

3. Genesis 28:22

Here we read that Jacob vowed to give a tenth of all that God gave him. In the context we do not read that the tenth was a condition set by God; Jacob himself did it. (A tenth, as a measure, was very popular in the old eastern cultures.)

4. Some reason that because tithing was part of the law given to Moses in order to sustain the Levitical priesthood, it should be used to support the pastors and ministers of the church.

There is not one single scripture in the New Testament which states that the traditional pastor/minister-figure in the church is a New Testament priesthood. **The ministry of the church is supposed to be open to all believers who desire to be used by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12/14, Ephesians 4:10-16, 1 Peter 2:5).**

5. Some people reason that because tithing is mentioned before the Law of Moses, it is universally applicable to all times. If this reasoning is applied to the Sabbath, it must also be instituted in the church, for it is also mentioned before the law (Exodus 16:23-36).

6. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus tells the Pharisees that they should tithe. This is often quoted as proof that Jesus commanded tithing to be practised in the church. Taking the statements of Jesus in context will show that He is talking to people still under the Old Covenant. Here again we see how a correct understanding of the symbolic meaning of the tearing of the veil, helps to understand the Bible. In Hebrews 9:17 we read that a will or testament only comes into effect at the death of the testator, the one who made it. This explains when the New Testament started: **at the moment of Christ's death on the cross, the Old Testament was replaced by the New.** Many ask whether the Old Testament should then still be read. Of course it should. It is more fully appreciated when we understand that in it we find the types, pictures and shadows that point to the reality, Jesus Christ. All the external ceremonies, rules, regulations and rites were only *“to tide worshippers over until the time of setting things straight – of*

reformation, of the complete new order when Christ, the Messiah, shall establish the reality of what these things foreshadow, a better covenant” (Hebrews 9:10, Amplified Bible).

We have already explained that with a change of priesthood must of necessity, come a change of law pertaining to it, as stated in Hebrews 7:11-12. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read of any laws that are introduced in which tithing is commanded to the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5).

In this context we understand that everything that Jesus said cannot directly be applied to the church. Some things were spoken to people still under the Old Covenant, to which He also had to submit until the time of His crucifixion. By not taking into account whether statements in the Bible relate to before or after the tearing of the veil, the church becomes vulnerable to many serious errors. For example, animal sacrifices could be introduced by stating that Jesus commanded them in Matthew 8:4! Didn't He instruct the leper that He had healed to go and sacrifice the applicable offering in accordance with the law found in Leviticus 14? Why is the same argument that is used to motivate tithing, not used in this case? Who would dare to try and introduce the sacrificing of animals in the church on the basis of this scripture?

A wider perspective of Tithing under Old Testament law

The tithe was a form of tax which was used to support a priestly class which was responsible for maintaining Temple worship. The Bible speaks of different types of tithes:

(i) One tenth of the initial income was to support the Levitical priests (Leviticus 27:30-33, Numbers 18:20-21). This was done because the priests could own no land (Numbers 18:21).

(ii) Another tithing rule is mentioned in Deuteronomy 12:17-18 where at the end of every three years all the tithes of that year's produce were to be kept in the local towns so that the aliens, the fatherless and the widows could be looked after in terms of having enough food.

(iii) In Deuteronomy 12 some more instructions are given concerning tithes and offerings. The Israelites were permitted to enjoy part of their animal and grain tithes, as long as it was eaten in the place indicated by the Lord (Deuteronomy 12:17-18).

(iv) Another fact that has to be considered is the fact that the land had to be rested every seventh year. This implied that most of the population, who were dependent on agriculture and farming, had no income for that year and therefore also no tithes to pay (Leviticus 25:4).

(v) To be consistent with the principles of tithing as found in the Old Testament, it seems that only freewill offerings could be used for the construction of buildings. Tithes were not used in the building of the tabernacle and the temple (Exodus 35:5, Ezra 2:69).

The question is again asked: Which principles of Bible exposition are used in selecting Old Testament scriptures to make a general tithing rule for the church out of such a complicated system? Why are all the scriptures qualifying the tithing principles simply ignored?

Conclusion

Traditionally, the tithing doctrine has been used to place believers in spiritual bondage. I have a tape recording of a well-known preacher warning his audience of thousands, by reading from Malachi 3:9 that the curse will strike them if they do not tithe! Has he ever studied the New Testament? In the letter written to the Galatians Paul explicitly states that Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13)! The tragedy is, whether the pastor preaches tithing or not, through tradition the impression generally sticks: God's blessing is determined by my performance in tithing! For this the traditional reading from Malachi chapter three, before the offering baskets are sent around, can be thanked.

If it is true that tithing protects us from curses and calamities, and ensures God's blessing, it was very irresponsible of Paul and the other New Testament writers to not mention one word of this in their writings to the church. Amongst many instructions of how to handle money and material possessions, not a hint of this dangerous doctrine can be found.

If one looks at the New Testament scriptures that teachers of tithing quote, one will find that nearly every single one of them, in their context, refers to the collecting of money for helping needy Christians (1 Corinthians 16:2-4, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, Romans 12:8).

5

THE ALTERNATIVE POINT OF VIEW – THE NEW TESTAMENT STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES OF GIVING

Background Theology

The Bible teaches that everything belongs to God. Psalm 24:1 says that the earth and everything in it, belongs to God. God's Word also declares that all the silver and gold are His and that all the animals on a thousand hills belong to Him (Hagai 2:8, Psalm 51:10). God is definitely not bankrupt or in financial trouble!

According to our talents, productivity and responsibility, He allows us to be **stewards over ten tenths**. He helps us to be good stewards by giving us principles in His Word **whereby we can become a testimony of His wisdom and provision**.

When discussing the subject of Godly stewardship, the following two basic principles have to be kept in mind: Firstly, one has to come to a point where one relies on what God promises He will do (Matthew 6:33). The element of faith in God as provider must be actively present. God honours faith, not works of law. Secondly, one has to act out the part that God expects **us** to do. God expects us to be obedient by living out the stewardship principles that He gives us in Scripture. In the parable illustrating the use of our God-given talents, Jesus

shows the reaction of the master of the responsible servant with the words: “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matthew 25:21). The Word of God confirms this in Luke 16:10 with these words: “*Whoever can be trusted with little, can be trusted with much.*” Thus, as we faithfully administer the material possessions entrusted to us, God can trust us with more and more.

Giving is but one of many stewardship principles mentioned in the Bible. Because we are contrasting the principle of giving with the paying of tithes, we will concentrate on this principle here.

Giving – The Underlying Principles

- 1. It is more blessed to give than to receive** (Luke 6:38).
- 2. According to your ability** (2 Corinthians 8:12, Leviticus 27:8, Acts 11:29, Esra 2:69).
- 3. Not sparingly** (Mark 12:43, 2 Corinthians 8:3, 9:6).
- 4. Not under compulsion** (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- 5. As each decides in his own heart** (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- 6. Systematically, planned and regularly** (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Nowhere does Paul or any other New Testament writer specify a certain percentage as a underlying principle in giving. Paul’s teaching that giving should not be under compulsion and that each one should give what he decides in his own heart is in stark contrast with the tithing rule imposed in so many churches. Paul teaches general principles. The rich must be rich in good deeds, generous and willing to share.

Those who have in abundance must be released from the law of giving only a tenth, while those who are poor and in need, must be released to give according to their ability (1 Timothy 6:17-18, 2 Corinthians 8:2-14).

Biblical Priorities in Giving

1. One must care for one's family first (1 Timothy 5:4-16)

This principle does not only apply to the giving of money, it also applies to the giving of self in terms of ministry. Numerous cases can be cited of marriages that have broken up as result of the spouse being neglected through the husband or the wife being too busy “doing the work of the Lord.” The need for attention created by this type of neglect makes the minister and his wife vulnerable to sexual temptation in the form of attractive persons of the opposite sex that come for “counselling”.

Those with families who believe that they have been called to the mission field, must be especially sensitive to the personal needs of their wives and children. Many families have been psychologically and materially deprived because of unwise commitments to ministry.

2. The needs of the body must be looked after

When it comes to material things there should be a balance in the body. This principle is found in what Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 8:14: “...*your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.*”

Although Paul made mention of the right of support for his ministry, he chose not to make use of it for the sake of his testimony and to demonstrate the principle of self-sufficiency (1 Corinthians 9:12-15). Paul stated that if a man did not work, he should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It should be noted that when elders are mentioned as overseers in the body of

Christ, preaching and teaching was part of their “work”. It is interesting to look up the reference “*The worker deserves his wages*” in 1 Timothy 5:18. Paul quotes the seventh verse of chapter ten of the Gospel of Luke. The setting of the context is where Jesus sends out seventy two disciples as workers into the harvest field, without purse, bag or sandals. The “wages” that Jesus refers to is being welcomed into homes and being given something to eat and to drink.

The massive financial empires of many modern day “disciples” out preaching in the “harvest field” contradict the spirit of the teachings of the New Testament. When one considers the general attitude of non-materialism as found expressed in a scripture like “*but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Timothy 6:8-10), we just cannot go along with the way in which 1 Timothy 5:17 is interpreted by some as to mean “double pay”. “*Double honour*”, as it is translated by some Bibles needs to be considered in the light of a scripture like 2 Corinthians 2:17 where Paul says that unlike many, he does not peddle the Word of God for profit. Take note of what Paul says about “*men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain*” (1 Timothy 6:5).

Some men need to be supported, not because they are in “full-time ministry” (to that all believers are called), but because of special needs that might be created by what they are doing to build the Kingdom of God. As part of the body of Christ they also have to have their needs met.

3. The needs of the poor, the widows and the orphans are high on the Biblical list of priorities (Galatians 6:6, James 1:26-27). However, not every woman who has lost a husband, automatically qualifies for help. In 1 Timothy 5:3-16 we find specific instructions for the church in this matter.

4. Good deeds and sharing (Hebrews 13:16, Galatians 6:10)

Selfishness is not compatible with what Jesus sets as a prerequisite for discipleship; Rather we are called to die to self (Luke 9:23).

Stewardship's High Standards

As in other cases, the moral and spiritual standard set by the stewardship principles of the New Testament is much higher than the Old Testament standard of tithing. Some, who give a tenth of their income, live out the remaining nine-tenths like worldlings. To be a good steward of ten-tenths, requires that money spent on entertainment, interest paid on overdrafts and other debts, and excesses in luxurious living have to be taken into consideration. Some believers pay more per month on a caravan standing in the backyard (used for only two weeks a year!) than they give to fulfil the principles of stewardship as set out in the Word of God.

Stewardship's Attitude

From God's point of view, the **attitude** of the giver is more important than the amount given. The ability and motivation to give, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer who is dedicated to doing the will of the Father. This type of giving

will be characterised by joy and willingness (2 Corinthians 8:2-12).

Stewardship Open to All

Giving is a spiritual exercise that even the poor can participate in because the value of a gift is not calculated by the amount or its worth, but by the attitude of the giver. The opportunity to give something to somebody in need must be seen as a privilege and not as an obligation.

Stewardship's Results

The results and fruit of giving include the spiritual enrichment of the giver and thanksgiving to God on the part of the recipient (2 Corinthians 9). Thus giving builds character in believers.

Conclusion

Giving is not God's way of building funds, but of building character

The church is not a club where membership fees have to be paid, and neither is it an institution that can prescribe taxes. The church is a body of believers under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is prompted to love, not only with words, but with actions (1 John 3:17-18). Money and material things should become available for meeting the needs of the Body as each believer gives according to what he decides in his own heart.

The role that money plays in a congregation depends entirely on the model of the church that is being followed. In the Old

Testament the people had to tithe so that there could be food in the storehouse (Malachi 3:10). In the New Testament the temple of God (the storehouse) has now become the members of the body of Christ. From the Old Testament type we can deduct that it is God's will for His people to have their needs met. If what is meant by "storehouse" is not consistent with what is taught in the New Testament, money will inevitably be wasted on things that have absolutely nothing to do with the fulfilling of the needs of God's people.

6

PRAISE AND WORSHIP FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF BEYOND THE TORN VEIL

Introduction

Throughout the ages singing and music have played an important part in expressing praise and worship in the religious experience of people. We have all enjoyed being uplifted by being in the presence of people praising and worshipping God in song. However, in recent years a subtle shift of emphasis has taken place in the way in which this has been applied. This shift of emphasis is best illustrated by the terminology that is so often used in “praise and worship” meetings. It is often stated, and taught, that during this time of the meeting, people are led into the presence of God. Sometimes we even hear that the presence of God can be “brought down” with praise and worship. Many equate being emotionally moved by singing and music to being influenced by the Holy Spirit. I have sat in a boisterous meeting where all the commotion was the result of an international speaker teaching that praise was “the sparkplug of faith.” In contrast, the Bible teaches that faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17). Some who are blatantly living out of the will of God, come into meetings and respond to the praise and worship going on around them. They get touched by the notes

and atmosphere, but surely not by God, because what comes out of them does not come from the heart.

What role do stirred up emotions play in praise and worship meetings? What about the use of electronic amplifying equipment during praise and worship meetings? What role does this equipment play in the influence exerted in these meetings? What would happen if the electricity should fail? Is the Holy Spirit dependent on external techniques and equipment or on the atmosphere of the meeting?

The importance placed on the praise and worship part of the meeting is shown by the fact that there are ministries that go around presenting seminars and courses in which song leaders are taught how to “lead people into the presence of the Lord”. One article in a church magazine, entitled “The Power of Praise and Worship”, explains how important sound is in obtaining “spiritual victory” and then goes on to say that “not much of God” can come out of a quiet person!

What does Scripture teach?

A serious spiritual danger is created when the presence of God is associated with pleasant feelings or a warm atmosphere. Positive or negative feelings, or circumstances, taken on their own, say absolutely nothing about the presence of the Lord. Think of the unpleasant circumstances that Paul so often found himself in: five times whipped, stoned, left for dead, three times in shipwrecks, floating on the open sea, attacked by robbers, in jail, thirsty and sometimes let down by false brethren (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). In spite of all these negative circumstances, he was assured of the fact of God’s presence. His faith was in God’s promise: “*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5). If we are to be brought into the presence of God in services, the question must

be asked: Where was God before I went into the meeting? Who was with me while driving there? And where is His presence needed most, in the pleasant atmosphere of the meeting or on the dangerous road? Think of some believers who had to suffer many years in communist jails. One man was locked up for fourteen years, of which three were in solitary confinement in a cell thirty metres below ground level. He writes that he never heard a sound, except now and then the faint screams of those who were being tortured for their faith. All that kept him, and many others like him, was that through faith they experienced the presence of the Lord. I am sure that if they could have chosen they would have preferred to be lifted up emotionally by the corporate singing and music of sincere believers in the warm, loving atmosphere of a meeting.

The Danger of Feelings

In the Old Testament external regulations and rites appealed to the senses of the physical body. In the new dispensation truth has to be experienced spiritually. When pleasant circumstances and feelings are associated with the presence of God, the tendency is that the person feels that God's presence has departed when the feelings are gone. This is the danger created by associating stirred up emotions with the presence of God. This also explains why some experience depression directly after "good" meetings. The contrast between the warm atmosphere of the meeting and the loneliness of an empty flat or room is just too great. Suddenly there is doubt concerning the presence of God, just because the pleasant feelings are no longer there. If such a person is not taught to take God at His Word and live by faith, continual spiritual and emotional instability will be characteristic of his or her life.

Theological Considerations

Hebrews 10:19-20 states that through the blood of Jesus, the believer has a new and living way into the presence of the Father. In some circles, what was achieved by the death and suffering of Jesus on the cross, the church has attempted to replace through song leaders and music! No form of mediation, other than the blood of Jesus, can bring a person into God's presence. This fact has to be accepted by faith.

The Influence of Soul Power

Alcohol and drugs are powerful agents that can be used to bring a person into an altered state of consciousness. Psychologists point out that music can also be used to help create an atmosphere in which people can be brought into that condition. We have all experienced a soothing and relaxing effect while listening to our favourite music. With this there is nothing wrong. Restaurants and other places of entertainment use music to great effect to create the atmosphere they want. All are familiar with what happens under the rousing influence of the music that is heard at rock festivals. Even the most primitive tribes use the rhythmic beat of drums to stir up dancers during their rites and rituals. It is very interesting to note that king Nebuchadnezzar commanded music to be made during the time that the golden image had to be worshipped (Daniel 3:5). Did he know about the psychological influence music can have on the emotions of people?

When sensual experiences, stirred up by any means, are associated with the presence of God, serious spiritual damage can be caused. Signs, manifestations, miracles and bodily sensations, because they belong to the realm of the senses, and

because they can so easily be counterfeited, can never be trusted as proof of the presence of God. Emotions are to be treated in the same way.

At the moment many churches are experiencing a revival – a revival of sensual experiences! This can be verified by attending certain meetings, viewing certain videos or religious programmes on TV. In spite of many scriptures warning God’s people to be “*sober minded*” (1 Thessalonians 5:6, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8, 1 Peter 1:13), people are encouraged and influenced to become drunk in the spirit. In such meetings the influence of the leaders in front, together with the singing and the music, play an important role in getting the people into an altered state of consciousness. A superficial reading of the Word of God will show that God is against any kind of drunkenness, whether it be physical, spiritual or emotional! In the Book of Isaiah we read of a prophetic warning of a time when God will pour out a spirit of drunkenness on the people, not as a blessing, but as a curse! (“*They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not from strong drink, but from spiritual stupor.*” Isaiah 29:9, Amplified Bible). One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is self-control, and the Holy Spirit will not work against Himself (Galatians 5:23).

The Word as Final Authority

“*Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth*” (John 17:17).

The will of God is revealed to us through His written word. That is why Paul warns: “*Do not to go beyond what is written*” (1 Corinthians 4:6). A believer grows spiritually in the measure that he responds to knowledge received from the Word of God. One should be very careful concerning doings in the church of which nothing is mentioned in the New

Testament. If it did not happen when Jesus, the most anointed person ever, ministered, why should it happen to me?

Conclusion

We are often asked whether we sing and make music in our meetings. Of course we do, but not **in order** to come into a presence, but **because** we appreciate and rejoice about spiritual truth. There is nothing wrong in responding emotionally to something that you appreciate, especially spiritual truth. The danger lies in associating emotions, stimulated from the outside, with the presence of God. When sensual experiences, like “goose bumps” and “liver shivers”, are taken as evidence for the presence of the Holy Spirit, the door is opened in one’s life to be influenced by the soul and even worse, to be influenced by counterfeit demonic spirits!

When Jesus has been invited in as Lord, His presence can be counted on. Did He not promise that when we open the door He would come in and fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20) and that He would then never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5)?

7

THE FULFILMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT LAW

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matthew 4:17).

We are often asked whether we still accept and read the Old Testament. Yes we do, but in the context of understanding that in the types, pictures and symbolism used in it, New Testament truth is illustrated and confirmed. For example, in 1 Cor.10 Paul refers to the history of Israel as they journeyed from Egypt, through the desert, on their way to the Promised Land. Mentioning their experiences, he then warns the New Testament reader: *“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come”* (1 Corinthians 10:11). This implies that we can learn valuable spiritual and moral lessons by studying the history of Israel. But it does not mean that Old Testament law can be put on the church. In Galatians 3:19 the question is asked: *“What then, was the purpose of the law?”* The answer is clearly given in the same verse: *“It was added because of transgression until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”* The “Seed” here, being Jesus Christ. Verse 25 of the same chapter then states that we are no longer under the law. *“Now that faith has come, we are no*

longer under the supervision of the law” (Galatians 3:25). The context of the whole of chapter three shows that the law which is referred to is Old Testament law.

How did Jesus fulfil the laws of the Old Testament? – by His teachings, death and resurrection.

Jesus often introduced His teachings by: “*You have heard that it was said...but I tell you...*” This was a direct reference to the old law. This did not mean that He contradicted it, but only that His standard required so much more. As an example consider Matthew 5:38-39: “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth’. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*”

The Teachings of Jesus

“*If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:31-32).

Although the truth of Jesus’ teachings sets us free from external religious rites and rituals, it does not set us free from the moral standards that He expects from His followers. When a comparison is made between the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and what Jesus taught, and what is expected by the moral standards of the New Testament, we find that not one single principle of the law is contradicted. In fact, what we do find is that in the new dispensation a much higher standard is expected.

The Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses as an Old Testament moral code, are recorded in Exodus 20.

In the first one He commands: “*You shall have no other gods before me.*”

Jesus comes and declares: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). In this statement the principle, as found in the first law of the Old Testament, is fulfilled. No other god or idol can take the place of Jesus as mediator between the true God and the sinner.

The second commandment prohibits idol worship. The New Testament states that believers are not to be yoked together with unbelievers and they should purify themselves of everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:14, 2 Corinthians 7:1).

The third commandment states that the Name of God should not be abused. Jesus said that a person will one day have to give an account before God for every idle word that he has spoken. Not just for abusing God’s Name, but for every word!

The fourth commandment requires that the Sabbath should be kept. Jesus sets the standard for anyone who would want to follow Him by saying that he must deny himself and take up his cross on a daily basis. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 the New Testament Christian is commanded that whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, it should be done to the glory of God. In the new dispensation there is no such thing as one day in seven being holy; it is seven out of seven, in **everything**; thought, word and action!

In Ephesians 6:1 children are commanded to obey their parents, but fathers are also told not to aggravate and irritate their children.

The sixth commandment prohibits murder. Jesus says that anyone who calls his brother a fool will be in danger of the fire of hell. Forgiveness, reconciliation and love for one’s enemies,

is a requirement for New Testament discipleship (Matthew 5:21-25).

We all know what the Commandments say about adultery. In the Old Testament a person could be stoned for committing adultery, but he had to be caught in the act and witnesses and evidence had to be produced; suspicion was not enough. Jesus raises the moral standard by saying that a person who lustfully looks at a woman has already committed the act (Matthew 5:27-28).

The law of the Old Testament says: *“You shall not steal.”* In the New, not only is stealing condemned, but usefulness and productivity commanded (Ephesians 4:28, Matthew 25:14-30). Some of the harshest words in the New Testament are spoken out against those who are too lazy to develop their talents. (*“...throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*)

The ninth commandment speaks out against lying and the giving of false testimony. Jesus says that your *“yes”* must be *“yes”* and your *“no”* must be *“no.”* He says that anything beyond this comes from the evil one (Matthew 5:37).

The tenth commandment says that one should not covet. In the New Testament we read that our lives should be free from the love of money and that we should be content with what we have (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus said that the pagans run after material things, but that his followers should not worry about what to wear and what to eat. He said that they should rather seek His kingdom and His righteousness and that all these other things would be added unto them (Matthew 6:33).

Conclusion

In concluding this section I would like to quote a few verses from the Book of Romans to clarify the fact that New

Testament Christians, although they are free from Old Testament law, do not have license for licentiousness. The following verses are very clear about this: “*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? By no means!*” (Romans 6:15). “*But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness*” (Romans 6:17-18). “*So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God*” (Romans 7:4).

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

Are New Testament Christians still under law? Yes! – under the “*law of the Spirit of life*” and under the “*royal law*” of love (Romans 8:2, James 2:8). In order to fulfil this law believers are required to “*walk in the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:16).

Amazingly, Jesus said that even the whole of Old Testament law hung on love; love for God and one’s neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40).

How is it possible that in spite of such clear statements, so many Christians allow themselves to be put in bondage to rules and regulations taught by a model of the church which is not based on New Testament teaching, but which is based on human tradition and Old Testament law?

8

TRUTH

Jesus said: “...*a time is coming and has now come when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks*” (John 4:23). What does Jesus mean by “*truth*”?

We get more insight by studying the Greek word *aletheia*, used for “*truth*” in the context.

Two of the meanings given by The Complete Word Study Dictionary (Zodhiates Th.D.) is: “...*the unveiled reality ... and truth as opposed to types, emblems, shadows.*” Another meaning given is: “...*to be true in doctrine and profession.*...”

The context of John chapter four explains what Jesus was referring to. The woman at the well asked Jesus the truth about the right place to worship; at the place where the Samaritans worshipped, or should it be at the temple in Jerusalem which was the centre of the Jewish system of religion.

Jesus acknowledges neither. He contrasts what was, with what now has come. “...*a time is coming and has now come.*...” He was referring to the new dispensation which He was introducing by his teachings. He was the Reality which had come to substitute the types, emblems and shadows of the Old Testament. Jesus used this same word when He said that He was the way, the **truth** (*aletheia*) and the life. The J.B.Phillips New Testament translates John 4:23 and 24 as follows: “*Yet*

the time is coming, yes, and has already come, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in reality.”

As we have explained already, the tabernacle or temple with its priests, sacrifices, laws, rules and regulations was “*a parable – a visible symbol or type or picture of the present age*” (Hebrews 9:9, Amplified Bible). All the rules and regulations of the Old Testament were “*imposed to tide the worshippers over until the time of setting things straight – of reformation, of the complete new order when Christ, the Messiah, shall establish the **reality** of what these things foreshadow...*” (Hebrews 9:8-10, Amplified Bible, emphasis mine).

The Consequences of Ignoring the Reality of New Testament Truth

“*Sanctify them by truth; your word is truth*” (John 17:17).

We are spiritually fed by the truth of God’s Word. The Word says about itself: “*all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When we refuse to open up to receive a certain Biblical truth, a spiritual vacuum is created and in some area our spiritual growth is stunted.

The consequences of denying New Testament truth are perhaps best spelled out by what is stated in Hebrews 10:26-29. “*For if we go on deliberately and willingly sinning after once acquiring the knowledge of truth...How much worse...punishment do you suppose he will be judged to deserve who has spurned and trampled underfoot the Son of God, and who has considered the covenant blood by which he*

was consecrated common and unhallowed, thus profaning it and insulting and outraging the Holy Spirit who imparts the unmerited favour and blessing of God?” (Amplified Bible).

Even in the Old Testament Eli had to be warned about not appreciating the provided sacrifice. “*Why then do you kick (trample upon, treat with contempt) My sacrifice and My offering, which I commanded...*” (1 Samuel 2:29, Amplified Bible). Isn’t this what Christians do when they deny the full benefit of the merit of Christ’s offering and sacrifice that God has provided on the cross?

When we think of sin, we usually only think of bad things, like drunkenness, adultery, murder and stealing. Yet the verb *hamartano*, used for “*sinning*” in the verse quoted above, in its literal sense, means “*to miss the mark and so not share in the prize*”. (Strong’s Concordance). Spiros Zodhiates, in The Complete Word Study Dictionary, explains it like this: “*To err, swerve from truth, go wrong, used in an absolute sense in 1 Corinthians 15:34, meaning to beware lest one be drawn into errors pertaining to faith.*” The same word is used in Titus 3:11 for “*sinning*”, where the context confirms that it is used to warn believers not to cause contentions in the fellowship by bringing in issues concerning Old Testament law.

Another variation given for the meaning of “*truth*” is to be “*true in doctrine and profession.*”

What is the “*knowledge of the truth*” that can be “*missed?*” – that can cause a person to lose the prize? We have already explained that this “*truth*” (*aletheia*), is the truth about Jesus Christ, the Reality, who fulfilled and replaced the Old Testament system of religion with its types, emblems and shadows.

The context of the discussion of chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Book of Hebrews shows that some of the Hebrews were not

being true in doctrine and confession concerning the complete new order in Christ. They were again building for themselves a system of religion based on the shadows, types, emblems and laws of the Old Testament.

The warning from the Book of Hebrews is that, after having received knowledge of the truth, one should not wilfully continue to sin by attempting to earn favour from God by respecting parts of Old Testament law. **By not living in the reality of the New Testament, one is “missing the mark” and “trampling under foot” the blood of Christ and insulting the Spirit of grace** (Hebrews 10:29, Amplified Bible).

In Galatians 2:1-6 we read about what Paul had to say about people in the church who tried to put others in bondage with rules and regulations taken from the Old Testament. “...*false brethren who had been secretly smuggled into the Christian brotherhood; they had slipped in to spy on our liberty and freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might again bring us into bondage under the Law of Moses.*”

We sometimes very subtly insult the Spirit of grace and deny the merit of the blood of the New Testament. For example, for many years I had the idea that God was especially impressed by prayers prayed at five o'clock in the morning! It was a subtle way of trying to earn the blessing of God by something I did! Today I realize that God listens to me, not because of my performance, but because I rely on the merit of Jesus, my Saviour.

Some Christians deny the power of the blood in the way in which they try and deal with some of their spiritual problems. Instead of believing what the Word says: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone*” (2 Corinthians 5:17) and “*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on...*” (Philippians

3:13), they keep dwelling on and delving in their past, and in so doing keep negative things alive which prevents spiritual growth towards maturity.

Similarly, others expect to be blessed because they rely on an Old Testament principle which promises blessings to those who tithe – just another way of insulting the Spirit of grace.

We might think it harmless to call a building made out of cement and stone “the house of God”, but by doing so we are denying New Testament truth. Other examples have been discussed earlier in this book.

When the people asked Jesus what they should do to do the works of God He replied: “*The work of God for you is to believe in the one whom he has sent to you*” (John 6:28-29, J.B. Phillips).

Obedience to Truth

Most Christians would agree that the Bible is the sole rule of faith and practice for Christians. But why all the differences in what Christians believe? Some say it is a matter of interpretation? But if our departure point is the grammatical principle that words have meaning, we should agree about most things that are written in the Bible. We commonly apply this principle of interpretation in reading. When, for example, we read the book Jock of the Bushveld we understand the story and agree about what the book says. Why should the words in the Bible be treated differently? Admittedly there are places where symbolism could cause problems with interpretation, but most of the important doctrines in Scripture are not based on symbolism, but on clear teaching expressed in ordinary words.

We are forced to admit that most doctrinal differences are not theological in nature, but are caused because the plain teaching

of the Word of God has lost its authority and is not accepted as the last word in settling arguments.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and promised that when He came, He would guide believers into all truth (John 16:13). **From this we can deduct that one of the sure signs of being obedient to the Holy Spirit would be a progression in Biblical truth.**

When a person gets born again and is obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he starts off on a journey of truth. Following Jesus is a journey of change; a journey into more and more truth. To the believing Jews, Jesus said: *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed...”* (John 8:31, KJV). The NIV says it like this: *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:31, 32).

Many who confess Jesus as saviour, stay in bondage in many areas of their lives, because they do not understand that Jesus sets people free through their responding to the truth that He reveals to them – truth about themselves, truth about others and truth concerning doctrine. Many get confronted with Biblical truth that clashes with what they were taught, yet because of pride, prejudice and fear of rejection, they do nothing about it.

The Moral Aspect of Truth

Jesus said that if anyone wanted to do God’s will, he would know that His teachings were from God (John 7:17). I am sure that for the believer sincerely wanting to do God’s will, the Holy Spirit will guide him into more and more truth. John was so sure of the truth that he preached, that he could say: *“We are from God, whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognise*

the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood” (1 John 4:6). Paul also unconditionally states: *“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you”* (Philippians 4:9).

Do the things that you and I believe and do in the church, line up with what is taught in the Word of God?

We are spiritually fed by the truth of God’s Word (Matthew 4:4). *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Ultimately, when a believer refuses to receive or acknowledge spiritual truth, it is not a problem of understanding what the Word of God teaches, but rather a problem of esteeming something else higher than the truth of God’s Word. This makes it a moral issue. Usually, because of the rigid doctrinal structures of the different denominations, it is the fear of breaking traditional relationships, that count heavily. The Word itself warns of this: *“Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition”* (Matthew 15:6).

Spirit

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24, NIV).

The spirit is that incorporeal part of a person that can live independently from the body and which enables him to communicate with God. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul states that the *“natural man”* (KJV) cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). *Psuchikoss*, translated as *“natural man”*, means the psychic or the soulish part of man. According to

The Complete Word Study New Testament it is “*the part of the immaterial life held in common with animals, as contrasted with spirit, only in man...*” One wonders whether this is the reason why some who do not live by the spirit, sometimes behave like animals?

Through the five senses the soul makes contact with the physical environment. This is the part that, according to the Bible, cannot receive or understand the things of the Spirit.

Believers should live by faith: not by sight (not by visible appearances), but by what is true as declared by the Word of God (2 Corinthians 5:7). The spirit of a believer is fed by the Spirit of God acting through the medium of the Word. Jesus declared that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). He, furthermore, prayed for His followers to be sanctified by the truth of His Father’s Word (John 17:17). God in His wisdom has made His will known to man in written form. Jesus ascribed the theological errors of the Sadducees to not knowing God’s will because of their lack of knowledge of the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29).

When one wants to objectively hear what God has to say about a certain subject, it is logical that the place to start would be to make a study of the Bible. Without knowledge of the written will of God there is no other objective way of discerning truth; therefore Paul warned: “*Do not go beyond what is written*” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Conclusion

Many believe that there is a revival going on in the church. When we carefully analyse the situation, we see that it is a revival, but a revival of the senses. Often sound teaching forms but a small part of meetings. A heavy emphasis is

placed on the experiential; that which can be perceived by the senses. This is well-illustrated by a conversation two young people were having concerning meetings. They were overheard discussing meetings taking place in a certain centre that were attracting thousands. One young man described the meetings as “awesome”. When he was asked why the meetings were “awesome”, he explained about the music and smoke billowing from the stage, the flashing lights and the fantastic atmosphere. He added: “Sometimes they even have a good sermon.”

Where people are not fed on sound teaching from the Word of God, but are entertained by catering for their senses, spiritual discernment gets blunted. This ultimately leads to a situation where people can no longer distinguish between what is spiritual and what is soulish. When sensual perceptions are mistakenly interpreted as the work of the Holy Spirit, a person is wide open for serious deception.

What is the ultimate in sensual experience? – satisfying the sexual urge. Could this account for the fact that we hear of so many cases of divorce in the church, even amongst leadership, as a result of sexual unfaithfulness? Where the church substitutes the thirst of the spirit with the lust of the senses, “*my soul thirsts for God*” (Psalm 42:2), becomes “*I thirst for wealth, pleasure, sex and success.*”

9

HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD AND DOING HIS WILL

Introduction

The media recently gave much publicity to the predictions of a prophet who claimed that he had heard from God and he prophesied that one of the members of his congregation would rise from the dead. At the predicted time nothing happened!

Files full of examples can be cited of things that were done by well-meaning believers in response to what they thought had been the voice of God, but which ended in disillusionment. What then did they hear that they thought was the voice of God? At the outset of this discussion we must clearly state that what is questioned here is neither integrity nor motives, but only the underlying way of thinking that causes people to believe that they have heard the voice of God. It must also be emphasised that what is questioned here is not whether God speaks or guides – we all know He does – but the way in which He does it.

Evaluating the Traditional way in which the “Voice” of God is heard

It is taught that God has a perfect will and a perfect plan for each believer. Because every sincere believer has the desire to

please Him, it becomes important for him to find out what God's perfect plan is in every situation – when a car has to be bought, when one has to decide which job to take, who to marry or which investment to make.

When we analyse the way in which many believe they hear God's voice, we find that it boils down to listening to an inner impression. We can hear it in the terminology of so many Christians around us: "God told me", "God showed me". An inner impression gets interpreted as the voice of the Holy Spirit. Because the implications of reacting to this "voice" are so far reaching, it warrants serious evaluation. In response to it people have, for example, sold their homes, given large sums of money away, changed jobs, made prophesies that have radically affected the lives of others, got married, got divorced and opened businesses.

Is listening to an inner impression the normal way in which God speaks to His children?

The problems concerning inner impressions

1. Inner impressions are subjective

It is quite normal for a person to have inner impressions; however, it is important to appreciate that many factors can play a role in their formation. The human spirit is often the source, but the danger exists that deceiving spirits can be involved. Fatigue, illness, drugs, experiences, or even the weather, can all play a role in influencing the type of impressions that are formed in people's minds. Furthermore, there is the important role that books, advertisements and the media play in terms of creating inner impressions. From all this, it is clear that if inner impressions are to be taken as a form of guidance, the voice of the Holy Spirit has to be

discerned. This is why so many sincere Christians, so often, find it difficult, stressful and confusing to be sure about what the will of God is when it comes to decision-making.

2. Inner impressions are not authoritative

Teachers of the “inner voice” method recognise that inner impressions are not authoritative in that they insist that they have to be confirmed by other sources; a scripture, confirmation of the body (other brothers and sisters), and also by circumstances. It is believed that when these things are “in line” and confirm each other, God’s voice has been heard. When we analyse each one of these factors that is supposed to confirm the impression, we see that each one in turn is also subjective.

(i) Scriptures

Dates when God has “spoken” in confirmation are usually written next to positive verses that promise health, wealth and happiness. Usually negative verses expressing hellfire and brimstone are ignored when confirmations are sought. Furthermore, subjective influence of a person’s theological background has to be taken into account; the denomination he belongs to, the Bible school he might have come from and the influence of spiritual leaders that he looks up to. All these things influence the way in which a person interprets scriptures and the subjective way in which he applies them.

(ii) Confirmation of the Body

Very few people have the objectivity to honestly evaluate the opinion or criticism of those who differ from them. The ones

who come up with the confirmations and whose opinions are accepted, usually belong to the same church and have the same theological mindset. A wise man once said: “If you have money for only one newspaper, make sure you buy the opposition’s.”

(iii) Circumstances

In the Bible we have good examples of people who were misled and who made wrong deductions by looking at their circumstances. One of the best cases is the warning that was written to the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:17-18). They were looking at their material abundance and thought that they were rich and did not need anything. They did not realise that their material wealth was no sign of their spiritual state; in fact they were “*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*”

Christians dare not make any positive or negative spiritual deductions by looking at what they possess or do not possess materially.

In another instance the inhabitants of the island, Malta, initially thought that the gods were against Paul because after the disaster of the shipwreck, he was bitten by a viper. When they saw him shaking the snake off into the fire and nothing happening to him, they quickly changed their opinion and said he was a god (Acts 28). In both cases they came to wrong conclusions by looking at circumstances.

What have we learnt? If the elements of confirmation are all uncertain, the “voice” will also be subjective and uncertain. Instead of simplifying things, the subjective factors of confirmation just tend to complicate things!

3. Does God have a mature will for mature Christians and an immature will for immature Christians?

Immature Christians tend to make more unwise decisions than mature ones. If communicating His will through inner impressions was God's normal way of speaking to His children, then wisdom and maturity would not play such an important role in decision-making in every day life. God's will is perfect, even if it is revealed to a child. Maturity, not the ability to receive esoteric revelation, is one of the most important qualities required for elders in the church as set out in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 2.

4. Everyday decisions versus major ones

Everyday hundreds of ordinary decisions are made by using our common sense. For example, we see that the tank needle shows empty and we stop for fuel. Where do we draw the line between minor and major decisions in terms of the way we deal with them? At which stage does our own responsibility to make wise decisions stop and at which stage do we wait for a voice to guide us? Again, uncertainty!

5. Biblical examples of guidance relative to inner impressions

Inner impressions cannot be compared and placed on the same level as most of the examples of guidance given in Scripture. Most of them were supernatural revelations through angelic appearances, an audible voice, visions and physical miracles. While inner impressions are real and a common experience, Scripture does not state that such impressions are authoritative.

6. Peace as a guide in decision-making

Usually we are told that when we experience peace in decision-making it means that we are doing the will of God. The verse from Colossians 3:15 is usually given as a basis for this belief. We must point out that the context of the discussion of Colossians chapter three is not guidance through inner impressions, but a moral lifestyle. The peace that is mentioned here has to do with relationships with one another as members of the body of Christ.

Is the presence of peace always an indication of the Holy Spirit's guidance, or can it be explained by other factors? Sometimes believers can experience peace in what they are doing because of wrong teaching, immaturity and ignorance. Feelings alone are no indication of God's approval or disapproval. It is unlikely that Paul had "inner peace" in all the adversity that he suffered: stonings, beatings, shipwrecks, jail sentences, drifting on the open sea, hunger... (2 Corinthians 11), yet he never doubted that he was doing the will of God.

Inner feelings should not be taken as reliable evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in a person; what should be looked at is whether there is a change of disposition and conduct.

What about throwing out a fleece for getting to know God's will?

Because God is who He is, He can do anything He wants to. He can also honour a sincere person's faith by responding in confirmation to a "fleece" that was thrown out. But by studying the part in Scripture where this method of guidance is taken from, we quickly see that we have no scriptural basis for applying this method as a form of getting to know the will of God.

In Judges 6:12 we read that the angel appeared unto Gideon and made God's will known to him by speaking to him. Gideon then asked for a sign as confirmation. Fire flared from the rock and consumed the meat and the bread that Gideon had placed on it. Gideon was still not satisfied and put out a fleece and asked God to allow the fleece to become wet, whilst the ground stayed dry. It happened the way he wanted. Still he was in doubt. He then asked God to let the dew fall on the ground and let the fleece stay dry. Again it happened as he asked.

The point we want to make is this – Gideon did not throw out a fleece in order to get to know the will of God; that was given to him by the word of God that came to him through the angel. His asking for a sign was because of his lack of faith in the word of God that had already made God's will known to him! Why does the fleece method sometimes produce good results? Sometimes when a fleece is thrown out it contains a principle of wisdom. For example: I say to myself that if I get fifty thousand rand for my car I will know that it is God's will that I sell it. (The car is only worth thirty thousand!)

What about the drawing of lots?

Some are of the opinion that because the apostles drew lots to decide who to choose in the place of Judas (Acts 1:21-26), that it is a legitimate way of finding God's will. The answer is again found by looking at the context. It was decided that a requirement was that the person who was to be chosen had to be one of them who had been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry up to the time of his ascension. Two men who met these conditions were proposed. It seems that they would have been satisfied with either one. Here we have a case of equal options. They recognised the sovereign will of God by first

praying and then drawing lots. In order to get to the short list they had followed the way of wisdom. Only in cases where you have equal options and where you do not want to show bias, would it be wise to draw lots.

Conclusion

If inner impressions come directly from God and make His will known to us, why do we still need confirmation? The fact that confirmations are sought proves the fickleness and inconsistency of impressions. The rate of success of this method is too low and inconsistent to be acceptable as the way in which God guides His people in a regular way. Bear in mind that we usually hear only of the success stories, but what about all the failures that we never hear about?

Another thing to consider is that even unbelievers sometimes get “hunches” that lead to success. When we are honest with ourselves we must admit that usually most of our “hunches” lead to nothing. Inner impressions must at least have more uniform results before they can be accepted as the voice of God.

What is the alternative? Instead of asking how to hear the voice of God, shouldn't we rather be asking how we can make wise decisions?

10

THE WAY OF WISDOM

“Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste. Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 24:13-14).

“Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise...Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is” (Ephesians 5:15-17).

“...be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

We cannot speak about the will of God without distinguishing between His sovereign and His moral will.

1. The Sovereign Will of God

There is not much that we can say about God’s sovereign will. God can do what He wants, to whom He wants, when He wants. Except for the things that He has chosen to make known in His written word, the Bible, His sovereign will is an unknown mystery.

From the Word we do know the following:

(a) According to God's standard His sovereign will is good for you. In the letter to the Romans we read that in all things God works for the good of those that love Him (Romans 8:28).

(b) God is very powerful and what He wants to let happen, will happen.

(c) The whole spectrum of the supernatural falls under the control of God's sovereign will. Here we think of things like the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11), angels, miracles, healings, and one aspect that we want to especially emphasise for the sake of our discussion on hearing the voice of God, **special guidance**. God can and does still speak to people in special ways: it can be through an audible voice, through dreams and visions, even through a donkey if He chooses. The Bible is full of these supernatural manifestations. However, you can believe that He is able to, and you may even ask Him to speak to you in this way, but there is nothing that you can do to make it happen. It is God's sovereign department. If it happens, it happens, if it does not, it does not. The responsibility to make it happen does not rest on the believer, but on his Master. Since when does a servant make up his own orders? If the servant does not hear anything, it is because his master has not spoken. The responsibility is not on the believer to conjure something up that must be taken as the voice of God!

One thing that we can say about this extra-Biblical manifestation of the supernatural voice of God: it is very scarce. (Note that here we are not referring to the voice of God coming to us every time we read the Bible.)

The Way of Wisdom also considers the moral will of God.

2. The Moral Will of God

The moral will of God is fully revealed to us in the Bible. All Scripture is inspired by God and is given for “*teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

One of the pieces of our spiritual armour with which we can defend ourselves against the deception of deceiving spirits is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). Jesus also tells us that man cannot live by bread alone, but needs to live spiritually from every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). It is unwise to listen to any voice, inner impressions included, before getting to know what the written voice of God, the Bible, has to say. Paul took the revelation of God in written form so seriously that he said that, concerning spiritual matters, one should not go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Here I am reminded of a leader in a well-known church who asked me why I did not agree with certain manifestations that were taking place in his meetings. When I quoted that one should not go beyond what is written, he argued that modern fridges, microwave ovens and TV’s are also not mentioned in the Bible and did that mean that Christians are not allowed to use them. He was serious! My reply was that I found it difficult to reason with somebody who did not know the difference between spiritual doctrine and modern day household appliances!

Jesus reiterated the importance of following His Word when He said to those who were listening to him that if they would put His words into practice they would be like a wise man who built his house on a rock. We need not wonder or try to listen to our own imaginations to find out what His words were –

they were recorded for us in Scripture by inspired men who heard Him speaking. God does not treat His children like puppets or robots. The fact that each believer will have to appear before the judgement seat of Christ one day to give an account for what he did with his life, proves that we have the responsibility of ordering our lives according to God's moral will (Romans 14:12, Galatians 6:5, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). The moral will of God acts like the beacons that life savers put up on the beach to indicate the area where it is safe to swim. They do not mind what you do in the water; you may splash or swim as you please, as long as you stay between the beacons. Perched on their high seats, they keep watch, and as soon as somebody goes out of the safe area, they blow their whistles and wildly wave their arms to order the person back. In a similar way God has given us freedom to do as we like, as long as we stay between the beacons of His moral will.

Here it is important to refer back to a fact previously mentioned; **special guidance**. If you have received special guidance to do something, then you must do it. If you do not have such direct instructions from God, then you have the freedom to live out God's moral will in the way that you choose.

For example, if you are sure you have special guidance to go and do missionary work in Russia, then you better get there. However, if you have received no supernatural guidance from God about a specific place, it does not mean that God has nothing for you to do. His moral will is revealed to you in a Scripture such as Matthew 28:19: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* If God has not clearly told you to go to a specific place, He does not mind where you want to go and stay – Matatiele, Pretoria or Cape

Town, as long as you obey His moral will while you are there, which, among many things, include the making of disciples and teaching them His Word.

A man came to see me once because He thought it was God's will for him and his family to go to a faraway place to do missionary work. I asked him whether he had special guidance. He asked me: "What's that?" I did not think that he had it! When God speaks to you directly in terms of special guidance, it will be so dramatic that you will know it!

In Acts 16 we find an example of special guidance. Paul and his companions were trying to do what they knew to be God's will for them, to go and preach the Gospel. Several times they missed it in terms of the place that they wanted to go to. God then stepped in and gave them special guidance through a vision of a man calling from Macedonia, to which they immediately responded. It was not something they thought out, imagined or even expected – it was totally supernatural and a sovereign act of God.

In summary, the following principles should be considered: **The specific moral commands and general principles given in the Bible are not good suggestions; they are given to be obeyed! Where non-moral issues are concerned and where God has not revealed His specific will in terms of special guidance, the believer is free to make his own choices based on wise decision-making which will glorify God and lead to spiritual enrichment. Although we are given the freedom to make our own plans, we should submit all our planning to the sovereign will of God. He has the right to interfere as it pleases Him.**

This principle of having the freedom to make one's own plans, but submitting them to the sovereign will of God, is confirmed in James 4:13-17. *"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there,*

carry on business and make money.’ Instead you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’” It is not against our own planning that we are warned, but against not acknowledging the sovereign right that God has to step in and change our plans if He wants to.

By doing His moral will God wants us to bring glory to His Name in everything that we do. (“*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*” 1 Corinthians 10:31). His moral will is the expression of His character. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He has given us the ability to live out His moral will, which is to be righteous, pure, full of love, forgiving, compassionate, patient, submissive, obedient, kind and generous.

What role does conscience play?

From Scripture it seems that God has implanted in man a basic sense or consciousness of the reality of His existence. This basic conscience that even primitive people have (though often suppressed), should teach them the difference between right and wrong (Romans 1:18-32). Unfortunately, the sinful nature of man comes and distorts this basic conscience with ungodly cultural traditions. So for example, some primitive races see nothing wrong in creeping up on their enemy, killing him and hanging his scalp in a prominent place in his dwelling. Many scalps are esteemed as items of great honour!

A person’s conscience can become calloused by wrong upbringing, and in the case of believers, wrong teaching. Paul clearly warns that in later times some believers will abandon the faith and follow teachings of persons who have been influenced by demons and “*whose consciences have become seared...*” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). The Word of God encourages a person to allow his thinking to be influenced by godly

teachings so that he will be able to discern what is right and wrong. Paul put it like this: “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is...*” (Romans 12:2). Like any other form of guidance, you also have to submit your conscience to the Word of God to determine if it is leading you in the right direction.

What about Romans 8:14?

The latter part of this verse that says: “*...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are the Sons of God*” is usually quoted as proof by those who interpret inner impressions as the voice of the Holy Spirit.

When we look at the immediate context of this verse we see that general moral living is being discussed – the putting to death of the deeds of our sinful nature – it does not deal with daily decision-making in non-moral issues. What is being discussed is righteous living. There is no indication of a certain method being discussed that will lead to finding an individual will. Some refer to the “voice” in Isaiah 30:21 as proof of the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the context of the Old Testament, it may be a reference to the voice of the prophets, sent by God to lead the people. However, there is no indication that the method of guidance which is mentioned in this verse is a reference to inward impressions

God-given resources that can help us make wise, God-honouring decisions

1. Ask God for wisdom to make wise decisions. James 1:5 says that if any man lacks wisdom he should ask God for it, Who will give generously.
2. Common sense is a valuable gift of grace that develops as the mind is renewed by the Word of God. (Romans 12:1, 2) It is just a pity that common sense has become so uncommon! Common sense is so important that in Titus 2:2 it is mentioned as a qualification for being an elder in the church. The Greek word, *sophron*, translated in the KJV as “*sober minded*”, actually means “*to be wise*” or “*being of sound mind*” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary). The only time that common sense should be ignored is when it contradicts God’s moral will.
3. Spiritual Counsellors (Prov.11:14). Note, however, that counsellors may contradict each other in the advice that they give, and therefore what they advise must also be evaluated.
4. Personal Desires. Desires are not authoritative and must, therefore, also be evaluated. When options are equal, choose the one that will be the most enjoyable!
5. Circumstances. Circumstances have to be considered because they provide us with valuable information in the making of wise decisions.
6. Inner Impressions. Inner impressions may be considered, but they are not to be considered as authoritative. Impressions that conform to God’s moral will and that can pass the test of wisdom, may be followed.

Conclusion

The fact that the early apostles must have followed the way of wisdom is demonstrated by looking at some of the terminology that they use in the Bible. They were open to divine intervention through special guidance, but it seemed that they understood the principle of freedom to choose their own course of action in pursuing Godly goals. Consider the following examples of the way in which they spoke: “...*we thought it best...*” (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2), “...*I thought it necessary...*” (Philippians 2:25-26), “...*it seemed good...*” (Acts 15:28-29). Many other examples can be quoted. We may also consider the way in which the apostles appointed deacons in Acts 6:2-6. After making wise proposals, the Bible says that it pleased the whole group.

We are often asked: “But don’t you consider your inner impressions, look at circumstances or listen to what the other members of the Body have to say?” Our answer is: “Of course we do, but not to guide us in an authoritative way, but to help us make wise decisions.” There is a big difference between allowing these things to lead you authoritatively and using them to assist you in making wise decisions.

So what is important is that in following the way of wisdom, the responsibility does not rest on the believer to stir up special supernatural revelation or guidance. The goal is not to struggle to find a “perfect will”, but to make wise decisions that will glorify God.

11

JUDGING

Introduction

In dealing with the subject of judging we will once again see how warped opinions are formed by quoting isolated texts and not looking at the Scriptural context to give a fuller understanding of issues under discussion.

The idea that some have of saying that the Bible teaches that one should not judge, is a mindset that is causing many Christians to be deceived and misguided. This attitude has allowed heretical doctrines and practices to spread like measles in the modern church. In some circles it has stifled the opinion of the individual to such an extent that no discussion or debate concerning Biblical truth takes place. A well-known international preacher has publically proclaimed that anyone who criticises his ministry would be cursed! This is an example of the type of intimidation and spiritual abuse that sometimes takes place. This man, and others like him, are not the ones who are primarily to blame for this situation having developed in the church – the people are! The Bible states that “...*the time is coming when people will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but having ears itching for something pleasing and gratifying, **they** will gather unto themselves one teacher after another to a considerable*

number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold" (2 Timothy 4:3, Amplified Bible, my own emphasis).

The people who uncritically and ignorantly give their support to denominations and preachers who are propagating unbiblical heresies are the ones who are to blame!

Judging or evaluating?

Let us look at Paul's attitude concerning ministry. Paul teaches that the prophets are allowed to speak, several at a time, but warns that the hearers must carefully evaluate what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29). It is clear that he places the responsibility for discernment in the ear of the hearers, not on the tongue of the speaker! Many have been placed under serious spiritual bondage because of the intimidating terminology of ministers speaking in the first person, as if it is God speaking directly to them. They have obviously not been taught that according to 1 Corinthians 14:29 the people have the responsibility to judge what is being said.

In order to understand what the Bible teaches about judging, one should make **a distinction between character and doctrine**. When questions are asked about someone's doctrine or teaching, it does not necessarily imply that the person's character is being judged. What is questioned is whether what the person believes and teaches corresponds with what the Bible says. When Jesus said: "*Do not judge, or you will be judged*" (Matthew 7:1), He was referring to criticizing behaviour patterns in others of which we ourselves are often guilty. Jesus' statement is against hypocritical attitudes. It is not an umbrella statement against all critical thinking. What He is saying is that one should judge oneself before attempting to help someone else. "*You hypocrite, first take the plank out*

of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." It is a call for recognising the faults in our own characters so that we can be patient with others who are also struggling to overcome theirs.

I wonder how those who say that one should not judge will deal with 1 Corinthians 5:6-13? *"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?"*

Warnings against False Teachers, Doctrinal Errors and Deception

In the Book of Revelation Satan is described as the deceiver of the whole earth; he has been so from the beginning. He is at war against the Lamb and His church. The world is drawing nearer to what the Bible calls the time of the end which will be characterised by a world wide deception of nations and individuals on a scale like never before. John, to whom the Revelation was given, described the world as already lying in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). Even though a person is renewed and in his heart wants to do the will of God, it is still no guarantee that he cannot be deceived. The tragedy about deception is that the last person to find out that he is being deceived, is the one who is deceived!

Jesus himself warned against false teachers and how to recognise them so that they can be exposed (Matthew 7:15-23). Paul also sternly warns that *"If any one does hurt to God's temple or corrupts it with false doctrine or destroys it, God will do hurt to him and bring corruption of death and destroy him"* (1 Corinthians 3:17, Amplified Bible). What a stern warning! Compare this with the attitude of tolerance found in the modern ecumenical movement where the truth of God's Word is being crucified for the sake of a false "unity" and

“love”! This situation will have serious spiritual repercussions for the Word of God warns that *“a little leaven (a slight inclination to error, or a few false teachers) leavens the whole lump (perverts the whole conception of Faith, or misleads the whole church)”* (Galatians 5:9, Amplified Bible).

In Revelation 2:2 the church in Ephesus is complimented by its Lord for testing those who called themselves apostles and found them to be false. Can you imagine how those ministries would have fleeced the church today, considering today’s weak emphasis of testing everything as commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:21!

The influence of deception on the mind manifests itself in many forms. A person is deceived when he misinterprets what the Word of God teaches. He is deceived when he is a hearer, but not a doer of the Word (James 1:22). He is deceived when he says he has no sin (1 John 1:8). He is deceived when he thinks highly of himself, when he is nothing (Galatians 6:3). He is deceived when he esteems the wisdom of the world (1 Corinthians 3:18). He is deceived when he thinks he is religious but he cannot control his tongue (James 1:26). He is deceived when he thinks that his actions will not have consequences (Galatians 6:7).

The forces of Satan adapt their tactics against believers and masquerade as angels of light. False ministries of men and women who themselves are deceived, mislead many and build up large followings, sometimes involving huge amounts of money, all through the gullibility and ignorance of people. *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Unfortunately, a widely-held view is that one should not publically mention any names of persons who are spreading wrong doctrine. Paul thought differently. He said that a workman of God should be one who correctly handles the

word of truth and then goes on to warn the church against two men that he mentions by name; Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:15-18). He said that they had wandered from the truth and that their wrong doctrine would spread like gangrene.

In church circles where there is an emphasis on the supernatural, deception will not so much be in terms of worldly things, but a counterfeiting of the true manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

The testing of spirits

The test, as translated in most Bibles, reads like this: *“This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God”* (1 John 4:2-3).

For a long time I have been wondering how the test could be so simplistic. Many God-dishonouring cults and many false prophets and preachers acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh. Even the demons know that Jesus is the Son of God (James 2:19). Surely there must be a deeper implication to this principle. The Amplified Bible gives a broader explanation. *“Beloved, do not put faith in every spirit, but prove (test) the spirits to discover whether they proceed from God; for many false prophets have gone forth into the world. By this you may know (perceive and recognize) the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges and confesses (the fact) that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, (actually) has become man and has come in the flesh is of God – has God for its source. And every spirit which does not acknowledge and confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (but would annul, destroy, sever, disunite Him) is*

not of God ...This non-confession is the spirit of antichrist...” (1 John 4:1-3, Amplified Bible).

How can the body of Jesus be annulled, destroyed, severed or be disunited? In His glorified body Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father where nothing can touch Him. Note, however, that the Bible teaches that the Word was there in the beginning and that the Word was with God and that the Word was God (John 1:1-2). Then the Bible says that the Word became flesh and lived amongst people on earth for a while (John 1:14). This truth shows the unity between the Word of God and Jesus – they are one. The Word is Jesus, His representation on earth today. The body of Jesus cannot be touched or harmed by anybody, but people can definitely annul, harm and pervert the Word. Therefore, how do you test the spirit of a person? – you confront him with the truth of the Word to see what he does with it.

False teachings that do not originate from the Spirit of God will weaken or ignore the authority of Scripture. They will also distort it and add to it the thoughts of men.

Jesus said that one should not throw pearls before swine, because they would trample on them. We all know that Jesus was not referring to pigs; He was talking about a certain type of person. The way in which some people trample on the pearls of truth found in the Word of God, reminds us of Jesus’ statement.

We have said it before and we say it again: the division found in the body of Christ is not so much caused by theological differences as it is caused by the fact that many do not accept the authority of “*it is written*” as the last say in an argument. Even Jesus, as the Son of God, when tempted by the devil, answered with “*It is written*” (Matthew 4).

Conclusion

The Word of God commands us: “*Watch your life and doctrine closely...correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction*” (1 Timothy 4:16).

In making a distinction between life and doctrine, Paul is warning that it is possible for believers to be very correct in doctrinal issues, but to come short in the application of what they know in their attitudes and conduct towards other people and sin. This is the lesson of 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter in the Bible – it is possible to have great faith and even to operate in the dimension of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and yet fall short in showing love in our relationships with other people. Just as we pursue doctrinal truth, we should work at allowing the Holy Spirit to ripen the fruit of the Spirit in our characters. We know that the Word teaches that our lives should display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, but we also know that just because we have the Word does not necessarily imply that we are displaying the fruit.

Fortunately, Truth stands on its own feet and we should be careful that we do not fall into the trap of believing that because there are so many short-comings in our lives, we cannot preach truth. We are Christians, in the first place, not by what we are, but by what we believe about Jesus Christ and ourselves. For the sake of our testimonies, let us be what Jesus would like us to be.

In concluding this chapter on judging, I would like to say that I have noticed a strange attitude amongst many believers – nothing or nobody is to be judged, except “heresy hunters” – they are open prey! Because of this attitude many believers are under the influence of men and women in ministry that are in deception. “*They are the kind who worm their way into homes*

(TV?) and gain control over weak-willed women...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth – men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone” (2 Timothy 3:6-9).

12

SIGNS, MIRACLES AND WONDERS

We so often hear about Christians flocking to places where it is believed that miracles are taking place. For example, we hear of things like gold dust falling on people, water being turned into blood, we hear of healings, supernatural voices singing from the ceiling and people falling “under the power”. We believe that to God all things are possible and therefore we do not deny the fact that God can, and still does, perform miracles today. The question that should be asked though, is not whether God is still able to perform miracles, but whether what is happening is from Him. The fact that the Name of Jesus is used in ministry is no guarantee that all, seemingly supernatural miracles, are performed by Him. Jesus warned that it would be possible for some to prophesy and perform miracles in His Name, without Him having any part in it (Matthew 7:22-23).

We are warned very seriously by Scripture that one of the signs of the end times would be a display of all kinds of counterfeit signs and miracles, done by Satan to deceive many. The Bible also warns that because people do not love truth, a powerful delusion would be sent by God so that the lie would be believed (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11).

How do we discern what is from God?

As a guideline, you do not look at the signs and miracles only; as we have already said, Satan could be responsible for them – you listen to what is said in preaching and teaching. If what is taking place does not come from God, somewhere down the line, something of what is said will not be according to the truth as found in the Word of God.

Conclusion

We repeat what has already been stated previously in this book – signs, miracles, manifestations and bodily sensations, because they belong to the realm of the senses, and because they can be counterfeited, can never be trusted, on their own, as a sign of God’s Holy Spirit at work. Christians should not run after miracles; miracles, according to what is written in God’s Word, should follow after them. Note what happened to the early disciples as they went out and preached God’s Word; *“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed His word by signs that accompanied it”* (Mark 16:20). It was not their opinion or someone else’s interpretation of what the Word says that they preached; it was God’s Word. Christians should not be pre-occupied with signs and miracles; they should be out declaring the truth of God’s Word.

Anointings

Jesus warned that in the last days false christs and false apostles will appear (Matthew 24:24). The Greek word *Christos*, that is translated as “Christ” in most Bibles, actually means “the Anointed One.” Therefore, false christs do not

necessarily imply anti-christs, ones who are openly against Jesus, but rather, men with false anointings. This is very alarming when we consider all the anointings that are passed around from person to person these days, sometimes in the most peculiar ways. How many different anointings do we read of in the New Testament? John speaks of one anointing only, initially given to believers by Jesus; an anointing that abides. *“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit, just as it has taught you, remain in him”* (1 John 2:24-27).

We should have faith in what the Word says we have received from Jesus. Submitting to strangers to be prayed for in order to receive an anointing can be dangerous. One could come under the influence of strange powers working through the other person.

13

TWISTING OF TRUTH

Satan is called the father of lies and one of his main strategies is to twist the truth in order to confuse people. This he did right at the beginning and he is still at it! When God created Adam he said to him: *“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”* (Genesis 2:16). God then saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone and He then made him a partner in the form of Eve. It is interesting to note that when Satan came to deceive, he chose Eve as his victim. You see, she had not yet been created when God gave the direct command to Adam and therefore she most probably heard about it from him. Like Eve, many Christians also know about God and His Word by hearsay only; from what they read in books about him, from what they hear on tapes, see on TV and videos and from what they hear from their pastors and ministers. **When you depend on other people for second hand knowledge about what God has said, you become an easy target for Satan.**

The devil alters and twists God’s word just a little, with fatal results. He says to her: *“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ ”* (Genesis 3:1)

The devil misquotes God’s words! God said that they could eat from **every** tree in the garden, except for the one. The devil confuses Eve by twisting God’s words and suggests that God said that they could not eat from **any** tree in the garden! What

is frightening is to think that this happened a very short time after everything had been created good. What must the situation be like now after a few thousand years of deception! If twisting of truth was one of Satan's main strategies right from the beginning, it would serve the serious seeker after truth, well, to look at some of the ways mentioned in Scripture in which it is done.

1. Traditions

There are more than 20,000 Christian denominations around the world today. Some are radically poles apart in thought and doctrine and most are built on what someone once said. Each one would state that the Bible is their only basis for doctrine and practice, yet why all the differences? The Bible, understood as being made up of an Old and New Testament, was given by God to make His will known to His people, not to confuse them!

We may find the reason for all the differences by looking at what is still happening in the church today. Instead of studying the Bible, book by book, chapter after chapter, line for line to find out what it has to say for itself, most Bible study groups use books written about the Bible or ones dealing with all kinds of topics, usually of how to be successful and happy. This you can confirm by listening to what many talk about when they get together; instead of sharing what they personally found interesting while studying the Bible, they tell you what they have just read in a book, or what so and so had said on TV the evening before, or what the preacher preached about in the last meeting. Tradition just means to go by hearsay! All traditions are not necessarily wrong, but it is only by subjecting them to the authority of what is taught in the

Word of God that you will know whether they are true to Biblical truth.

The whole emphasis of this book has been to compare some popular church traditions and teachings with what is written in the Word of God. Jesus recognised the danger of traditional doctrines and practices by warning: “*You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition*” (Matthew 15:6) Not many church members can intelligently explain from Scripture why they believe and do certain things in their church.

2. False prophets and teachers

Is a lack of unity or a lack of signs and miracles presented in Scripture as a sign of the end times? I do not think so. It is the issue of safeguarding truth that we are warned about. Deceiving spirits will make special effort to influence those who preach and teach and will try and mingle truth with their “teachings”. Good men can be deceived, and the idea that because someone is so godly he can be believed, is a deception in itself. The lifestyle of a man is not sufficient guarantee for the truth of his teaching. It is his teaching that must be judged, not his character. A good man who passes on wrong doctrine is a better instrument for deceptive purposes than someone with a bad reputation who would not easily be believed.

One of the most important signs given in Scripture of the end times, is a departure from truth. Jesus warned that false christs and false prophets would appear, performing great miracles and signs, to deceive even the elect (Matthew 24:24)!

How do you recognise false prophets? – by their false teachings. I believe it is the responsibility of every believer to point out where there is a departure from Biblical truth.

We are instructed in Scripture to “*correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For*

the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn to myths” (2 Timothy 4:2–4).

The Word of God has a very stern warning for those who are spreading false teaching. *“If anyone does hurt to God’s temple or corrupts it with false doctrines or destroys it, God will do hurt to him ...and that temple is you the believing church and its individual believers.” (1 Corinthians 3:17, Amplified Bible).*

Another thing that has to be considered is the role that money plays in modern day ministries. When one looks at the lifestyles and material possessions of some men and women in ministry, and at the emphasis they place on appealing for financial support, one wonders whether they have ever studied the letters written to the Corinthians. Or what the apostle Paul’s attitude would have been considering what he wrote to the Corinthians: *“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit” (2 Corinthians 2:17).* Incredible to think that as early as two thousand years ago many were already using the Gospel as a vehicle for making money!

3. False teaching and doctrines

There are many unscriptural doctrines that have become so accepted that hardly anyone ever questions them. Those that have already been discussed in this book include: tithing, covering and authority, the role of praise and worship, priestly figures and the church being organised as a worldly organisation. Others include: baptismal regeneration, the creative power of words, self-esteem, what you confess is

what you possess, visualisation, certain forms of inner healing, dominion teaching and mystical spiritual warfare.

Baptismal regeneration

The Bible teaches that God's grace, whether in salvation, sanctification or in providing for everything the believer needs for life and godliness, comes to man by faith. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith*" (Ephesians 2:8) and "*The just shall live by faith*" (Hebrews 10:38).

In contrast, the doctrine of Baptismal regeneration teaches that baptism has power to wash away sin, is essential for salvation and that it incorporates a person into the church. Denominations and groups that practise infant baptism, or christen babies, partake in varying degrees of this false doctrine. To prove our point we refer you to The Berean Call, February 1990, in which Dave Hunt quotes from various catechisms or statements of faith; Vatican II of the Roman Catholic Church declares: "*By baptism men and women are cleansed from original sin and from all personal sins, they are born again as children of God...*" (Vatican Council II, Costello Publishing, Vol. 2, p 561), "*Baptism is also to be given to infants...(that) they may be born of water and the Holy Spirit to divine life in Christ Jesus*" (Vol. 2, p 391). From Luther's Small Catechism he quotes: "*Holy Baptism is the only means whereby infants...can ordinarily be regenerated...it works forgiveness of sins...delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation...*" From the Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis we quote the following: "*Deur die doop word ons in die kerk van God opgeneem en van alle ongelowiges en vreemde godsdienste afgesonder om heeltemal sy eiendom te wees...*" (Article 34) ("*Through baptism we are incorporated into the church of God and get*

separated from all unbelievers and foreign religions to become God's property.”)

If all this should be true, at the question: “What must I do to be saved?” the answer should merely be: “Be baptised” and the ones who were christened as babies would have no problem. The easiest way of saving the world would be to baptise everyone as infants. To the question: “*What doth hinder me to be baptised?*” Philip replied, “*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*” (Acts 8:36-37, KJV). In Acts 2:41 we read: “*Those who accepted his message were baptised*” and in Acts 8:12, “*But when they believed...they were baptised.*” In Acts 16:29-30 the jailor asked the same question: “*What must I do to be saved?*” The answer is still the same, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved – you and your household.*” Some reason that because families were baptised, babies must also have been baptised. This type of reasoning cannot be taken into consideration because all families must have adults, but all do not necessarily have to have babies in their midst. In my own family for example, there are no babies at this moment; the youngest child is eighteen years old.

When one looks at the context of Acts 16, which is one of the places in the Bible where there is a reference to a whole family being baptised, we notice that in verse 32 it is stated that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to the jailer and “*to all the others in the house.*” In verse 34 “*...the whole family was filled with joy, because they had become to believe in God*” (Emphasis mine). If the reasoning that babies must have been included is carried to its logical conclusion, it implies that infants of less than a year old could understand the preached word and could also be filled with joy because of coming to faith in God! In Acts 18 we find another example of an entire household, who with many other Corinthians, came to faith. In verse 8 it is said that those who heard him and believed, were

baptised. The principle of first believing and then being baptised also clearly comes out in what is said in Acts 8:12. *“But when they believed Philip as he preached...they were baptised...”*

After spending years studying different doctrinal statements concerning infant baptism, I have come to the conclusion that clear, unambiguous commands and statements found in the New Testament like *“...go and make disciples...baptizing them...and teaching them...”* (Matt.28:19-20), *“Repent and be baptized...”* (Acts 2:38), and many others, are totally ignored in favour of arguments, difficult to understand, which are based on principles and scriptures drawn from the Old Testament. (About the Old Testament enough was said in the first part of this book.) The implication of believing that infant baptism can regenerate makes the church organisation an instrument of imparting salvation through applying external rites. This is then also how some state it in their confessions of faith. The reader is again referred to the February 1990 edition of The Berean Call in which Dave Hunt quotes from Vatican Council Vol. I, pp 365-66 where the following is said about joining the church: *“men enter through baptism as through a door.”* In the *Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis*, Article 28, under the heading: *“Elkeen is verplig om by die ware kerk aan te sluit”* (*“It is obligatory that everyone joins the true church”*) we read the following: *“Ons glo – aangesien hierdie vergadering ’n versameling is van hulle wat verlos word en daarbuite geen saligheid is nie...almal is verplig om daarby aan te sluit...”* (*“We believe – seeing that this is a gathering of them that are saved and that outside of it there is no salvation...everybody is compelled to join it.”*) Thus salvation is not through Christ, but through the church.

Offering salvation through baptism or any other physical act is a serious departure from what is taught in the New Testament and it endangers the eternal destiny of souls.

Proponents of infant baptism have to reach far back into the Old Testament to find a covenant on which they can base their theology. They reason that the Abrahamic covenant is an eternal covenant which in Christ became applicable to the church. Instead of circumcising babies, they now get baptised in order to be incorporated in it. Although not a single scripture can be produced as logical proof, their confessions declare that baptism had come in the place of circumcision. They further teach that the church has taken the place of Israel in terms of all the promises made in the Old Testament. (This doctrine is called Replacement theology.) What they do not understand is that Jesus Christ was born as a descendant of Abraham (through Isaac, the child of the promise) and so God fulfilled His promise to Him that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. In Jesus, believers, both Jew and Gentile, become part of the New Testament, but the Jews that reject Him as their Messiah, are still under the power of the Old Covenant. One cannot become a partaker of the New Testament by undergoing any external ritual or rite. It can only happen by placing a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Unconditional Election

The doctrine of unconditional election is based on what was formulated by the Synod of Dort which gathered in 1618, nearly four hundred years ago, in Dordrecht in the Netherlands. Its purpose was to finalise a statement of belief to counteract the rising opposition of that time against the teachings of John Calvin.

Under point number seven of the first section of The Canons of Dort, the doctrine of Election is explained as “*the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race ... a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ....*”

Hand in hand with the doctrines of Baptismal Regeneration and Election goes the belief that man does not have a free will and that he can therefore not will anything for himself. It means that those who are not chosen by God are damned to an eternal death. Neither those who are saved nor those who are condemned to hell have any say in their destiny. It is all according to the sovereign will of God. Calvinists state that salvation cannot take place by any act or belief on man's part. If you have not been chosen by God, there is nothing you can do about it! They believe that through the sovereignty of God, everything has been foreordained. Carried to its logical conclusion this means that God is then also the author of sin and rebellion against himself!

We need to compare this doctrine with what is plainly stated in Scripture. Throughout the Bible we read of how man gets confronted by situations in which it is expected of him to make moral decisions. Take Adam and Eve as an example. God gives them a command – they may eat of all the trees, except one. If they did not have a free will, why bother to give a command and then judge and punish them for doing something over which they had no control in the first place! If we have no control over moral decisions and everything we do is predetermined by God, why do we have to appear before the judgement seat of Christ one day as believers? “*For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the*

body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). In Deuteronomy 30:19 we read the following: “...*I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life...*” Another good example which confirms the fact that people have the power to make moral choices is found in the piece in the New Testament where Jesus cries: “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing*” (Luke 13:34). The last chapter of the Bible ends with the invitation: “*The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and **whoever wishes**, let him take the free gift of the water of life*” (Revelation 22:17, emphasis mine). These are but a few examples from Scripture that indicate situations where volitional acts are required.

It is amazing to hear some declare that Election and Baptismal regeneration were the only theological doctrines of the Reformation. It is even more astonishing to find out that there are many who have never heard of the radical wing of the Reformation who suffered for holding different beliefs. Anyone who wants to find out for himself, can go to a library or to the Internet and read up about the thousands and thousands of sincere believers who had to suffer for their faith at the hands of not only the Roman Catholics, but of Calvinists and Lutherans as well, because they did not agree with the above-mentioned doctrines and declared them to be unscriptural. The period around 1529 is described by some historians as the darkest chapter in the history of the Reformation. The Anabaptists, as those are called who did not agree with infant baptism as applied by Roman Catholics and other reformers like Calvin and Luther, were declared to be heretics. At first the Anabaptists, or *Wederdopers*, as they were called in Dutch, just received fines and got jailed. Later

some were put to death; Leaders like Mantz and Blaurock were executed. (Mantz by being drowned in the Limmat). In January 1528 an official edict declared all Anabaptists to be punished by death! It is shocking to read of how they tried to present their theological doctrines for discussion, but were refused a hearing! They experienced a time of terrible persecution; we read of bannings from home and fatherland, executions by the sword, burnings on stakes of fire, drownings and confiscating of property! The Roman Catholics and followers of Calvin and Luther saw them as heretics and fanatics. The historian, Günther S. Wegener quotes from a letter written by Lord Philip van Hesse, dated 19 August 1544, in which he complains that for every “fanatic” that gets executed, the manner in which he dies, motivates twenty others to convert to his kind of faith (Die Lewende Kerk, pp.174-180).

Calvin imposed his religious ideas on the people of Geneva by law, and transgressions were punished by imprisonment, floggings, banishments and burnings at the stake! Since then Calvinism has had a major influence in many countries of Western Europe, and has spread all over the world. In many countries it was adopted as the religion of the state. Where religious and political power end up in the same hands, human conduct towards those who are in opposition can become very vicious indeed. During the Reformation this was done in the Name of the Lord! Even today, although by law religious freedom is permitted, those who hold to the same biblical faith as the Anabaptists are still branded as sects and fanatics by many who are under the influence of the teachings of Calvin. Although it is very clear from Scripture that man is saved by the grace and mercy of God alone, it is also clear that because of His love, instead of limiting it to a selected few, He extends it to all mankind. *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and*

not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Instead of teaching that God is only interested in saving a limited group of people on earth, the Bible states that “*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...*” (John 3:16) and that He “*wants all men to be saved...and... gave himself as a ransom for all men*” (1 Timothy 2:4-6, emphasis mine). In spite of what Scripture so clearly teaches, the doctrine of Unconditional Election declares that God’s offer to “*whoever believes*” is open to only a selected few. Does it make sense for Jesus to invite “*all you who are weary and burdened*” to come to him if He knows He wants to give rest to only a limited group? To try and explain that the “*all*” of Scripture means only a limited few is to ignore the plain meaning of words and to contradict what the Word teaches about God’s far-reaching love.

In both Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2 it is stated that predestination is determined by God’s foreknowledge. Simply stated, it just means that God knows in advance who will repent and accept Christ as Saviour, and He predestined that they should conform to the image of His Son. To know things in advance does not have the same meaning as to determine or foreordain in advance. When it comes to rejecting the grace of God as expressed through the Gospel, a person cannot use God’s foreknowledge as an excuse to say that it was predestined for him not to believe. In the light of all the scriptures that declare that it is not God’s will for anyone to be lost, we realise how absurd such an argument would be. God’s foreknowledge is known only to Him, and therefore nobody can say that this played any role in his own decision not to believe. For those who accepted His Son, God predestined that they should become heirs of many blessings. In the context of the overall teachings of the New Testament, there is no

evidence that God ordained a definite number of people to inherit eternal life, and the rest to eternal damnation.

The Word of God declares that *“the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel...”* (2 Corinthians 4:4). According to this verse, and in contrast to what the doctrine of Election declares, it is not the action of God’s sovereign will that prevents people from being saved, but the influence of Satanic deception on their minds. It is the pulling down of these strongholds through preaching, reasoning and arguing, that the battle for souls is all about. If everything has been predetermined by God in terms of who must be saved and who must be lost and there is nothing that man or Satan can do about it, why all the conflict? If there is something like Irresistible Grace, why should Satan bother to try and blind people to gospel truth? If the doctrine of Unconditional Election is true, Satan wouldn’t need to bother to deceive the lost to hinder them from believing because they would have been condemned to hell by God Himself already.

Interestingly, one of the characteristics of people who believe in the doctrine of Unconditional Election is the constant state of doubt and uncertainty they are in concerning their eternal destiny. They can never really be sure whether they have been elected to make heaven or not. In contrast to this, the Bible clearly says that we may **know** whether we are saved; *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:13). *To all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12). Eternal life is a free gift, but it has to be received. It can be ignored or rejected. One thing is certain – we may play the part in front of others around us, but when we are alone and confronted with ourselves, each one of us knows exactly whether we have accepted the gift from God in Christ

Jesus. Thus coming to true repentance and submission to the Saviour is not something that you can do without knowing about it.

Mind- Science and positive confession

Mind-science principles, many of which come very close to being occultistic, are fed to the public through what I call the “How To” books. The same principles, dressed in religious terms, are freely available in Christian bookshops. How do these principles relate to true Christian faith?

Authentic Biblical faith which is faith **in** God, has, through mind-science, become a “force” that can be directed **at** God. Christians are taught that this power within can be developed by means of various mind-over-matter techniques such as positive confession, possibility thinking and visualisation.

When a person thinks that God should respond because certain techniques are followed, he is trying to manipulate God. Mark 11:23 which says: “...*if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him*” is often quoted by teachers of the Positive Confession Movement as proof that words have power. This statement is qualified by verse 22 which says: “*Have faith in God...*” The teaching of this scripture is not that our words have power, but that God has power! The emphasis is not on speaking the right words, but on having faith **in** God. The power is in the object of our faith, God, not in the words that we speak. Others stress the fact that God used words to speak the world into existence. Again it must be emphasised, it was not because words have inherent power that the world came into existence, but because it was **God** who spoke them. Proverbs 18:21, “*The tongue has the power of life and death*” is also used to show

what power words have. The context shows what is meant. It is not words in themselves that have any power, but an attitude towards life. Proverbs 17:22 says that a cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Jesus said that things that come from the heart make a man clean or unclean (Matthew 15:18). **Things that come from the heart determine one's spiritual state.** God looks at the heart. This is the context of much of Proverbs. "*The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom*" (Proverbs 10:31). We all know what harm can be done by a wicked person who cannot control his or her tongue. When James warns that the tongue is a "*restless evil, full of deadly poison*" we know he is speaking about harmful words spoken in slander. These verses do not teach that words have miraculous creative power. God is not so fickle as to allow everything we say in a light-hearted way to happen to us. If it was true that we put a curse on ourselves by everything we say, imagine how many people would not be with us today because they had literally "laughed themselves to death". It is a well-known medical fact though, that many psychosomatic illnesses can develop because of the release of harmful chemical substances in the body of one who is habitually critical and negative.

It should, furthermore, be borne in mind that in Proverbs it is King Solomon speaking and giving instructions to his son. The life and death in the tongue could also be a reference to the authority kings of those days had to determine the destiny of their subjects by giving a command. A positive or negative word spoken by the king could literally mean life or death to someone.

The wealth or prosperity gospel ("Name-it-claim-it-frame-it", or "What you confess, is what you possess") falls in the same category as any other doctrine that tries to manipulate God by external methods and techniques.

The Self-Esteem /Seeker-Friendly Gospel

According to some modern preachers the most negative thing that puts people off from attending church is the emphasis on the sinfulness and lostness of man in preaching. Man must be told how much he is worth in order to build up his self-esteem. Another tendency in many modern churches is to make church-going pleasant by catering for the physical and social needs of the people that go there.

As we read the Bible we see that throughout history the problem has been the sinfulness of man. If the wisest man that ever lived, Solomon, was made to fall by deception and sin, then we all need to be vigilant! The word of God declares that the heart of man is desperately wicked and deceitful, *“exceedingly perverse and corrupt and...mortally sick! Who can know it,...be acquainted with his own heart and mind?”* (Jeremiah 17:9, Amplified Bible). In John 2:23-24 we read that Jesus would not entrust himself to the people for He knew what was in the heart of all men. Not a kind compliment for building someone’s self-esteem!

Let us examine the manner in which Jesus and Paul dealt with those that were spiritually “seeking”. When the rich ruler approached Jesus inquiring how to be saved, he greeted Jesus with: *“Good teacher.”* Jesus’ reply sounded like a rebuke: *“Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”* Jesus then insisted that he sell all his goods, give the money to the poor and then follow him (Luke 18:18-27). Not a very seeker-friendly way of treating someone wanting to know how to inherit eternal life!

While Paul was in jail, the governor Felix and his wife sent for him to find out more about the gospel that he was preaching. The way that Paul presented it to them caused them

to become “*alarmed and terrified*” (Acts 24:24-25, Amplified Bible). Paul explained about righteousness, self-control and the judgement that was coming! Again not a very seeker-friendly way of presenting the Gospel!

A very popular verse that is often quoted to those who are seeking salvation is: “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). A very comforting verse, but the Bible does not stop there. Verse 36 of the same chapter goes on to say: “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.*” The dictionary explains “wrath” to be intense, violent anger. A very harsh statement for unbelievers to hear.

The Bible declares that there is no one righteous, that all have turned away and become worthless, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9-23). These days people are told in some churches that the value of an article can be seen in the price one has to pay for it; if you want to know how valuable you are and how you should esteem yourself, look at the price that God was prepared to pay for you – He gave His Son! The truth is the exact opposite! God’s love for fallen mankind was the reason why he sent his Son, not because he thought us so valuable. Throughout the Bible we see how God could do great things through weak, humble and untalented people. Think, for example, of Gideon who was the least in his family and who was compared to a cheap barley loaf. Think of David who was the youngest and tending sheep whilst his brothers passed by Samuel as consideration was given as to who should be king. Instead of building up their poor self-images and low self-esteem, God promised them that He would be with them. That is why Paul could say: “*For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Corinthians

12:10). If ever one had to suffer from rejection and low self-esteem, it should have been Paul, considering the insults, rejection and difficulties he had to face. The truth is that the entire Gospel is an offence to man's pride, because it tells him that he is a sinner, saved by grace through someone else's merit.

Visualisation, Dreaming and Inner-Healing

God can supernaturally give dreams and visions as He wills. Man has no control over what God wants to do sovereignly.

Visualisation is when a person intentionally, out of his own mind, makes up his own mental pictures. There is nothing wrong in using mental pictures in visualising a house we want to build or planning a holiday or trying to understand a concept. When however this technique is brought into the church and people get taught that they should "incubate" the answers to their prayers through the making of mental pictures of the answer they want, we are again applying a mind science as a means of trying to change reality or in an attempt to manipulate God to do what we want Him to do.

The shelves of Christian bookshops are full of books teaching that dreams and visions are the language of the Holy Spirit. However, many believers have been disillusioned and hurt because they have interpreted their day-dreaming as the voice of the Holy Spirit. We are reminded of the prophet's warning to Israel: "*The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat (for nourishment)?*" (Jeremiah 23:28, Amplified Bible). Jeremiah also warned of walking after the "*imagination of their own heart*" (Jeremiah 9:13-16).

In certain forms of inner healing people are taught to go back into their past and relive their negative experiences and then to imagine or visualise Jesus coming to them, touching them and healing them. Some testify to miraculous inner healing. Does that make it Biblical? How does a person discern who comes and “touches” him? It could be a deceiving spirit making use of the opportunity when the person is susceptible to any influence. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that this is the way in which to be healed of your past. The Bible states: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ...”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul stated: *“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...I press on...All of us who are mature should take such a view of things”* (Philippians 3:13-15). Christians should be taught what their inheritance in Christ is, rather than to dwell on the past. We do, however, not condemn all forms of counselling, for many people have been helped to overcome their problems by counsellors who have given sound Biblical advice.

The Gospel has not lost its power to make a person new through faith in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Subtly however, the emphasis has shifted from unconditionally trusting God whom we worship, to techniques that are used to try and get what we want.

14

MYSTICAL SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND AN END-TIME REVIVAL

Years ago I sat in a meeting addressed by a world-famous prophet. He told what had just been revealed to him from Acts 3:21, which reads: “*He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He has promised...*” From this scripture he explained that Jesus would stay in heaven and not come back to earth until everything down here had been restored and put into order by the church. Here again is an example of basing theories or doctrines on an isolated verse taken out of context, and not allowing the rest of Scripture to explain it. Sadly, this doctrine has developed and has swept through the church, causing much excitement amongst a new type of Christian who believes that the church can change everything on earth by taking back the dominion from Satan that was given to him when Adam fell. This forms the basis for a new, mystical, militant type of spiritual warfare that we read nothing about in the Bible.

When we study Acts 3:21, which many use as a point of departure for militant spiritual warfare, we realise that this doctrine is erroneous. Firstly, when we look at the context we see that the one through whom God is going to set everything in order is Jesus Christ, not the church. Verse 22 states that God is going to raise up a prophet like a Moses and he must be Jesus, for verse 21 says that He would stay in heaven until the

appointed time when He, by His second coming, would restore everything. This is confirmed by a scripture such as Philippians 3:20-21: *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that we will be like his glorious body.”*

The Scriptures clearly indicate that through the fall of Adam, Satan managed to gain control of sinful, unbelieving mankind. However, through His death and resurrection, Jesus redeemed us to be stewards under His authority of God’s grace on earth. The belief that the church has been given authority to take dominion over all the forces of evil on earth and in so doing, restoring godly order in preparation for the second-coming of Christ, forms the background for this new type of spiritual warfare which is causing much excitement amongst Christians. The “Dominion” teachers, as those are called who propagate this teaching, seem to ignore clear Biblical guidelines in some of the declarations and prophecies that they make. In contrast to what the Bible says, they prophesy and teach that the world will experience a great end-time revival like never experienced on earth before. The Bible, however, predicts that *“There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”* (2 Timothy 3:1-5). In verse thirteen of the same chapter we read that *“...evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”* The opposite of what the “Kingdom-Now” (as the dominion teaching is also called) teachers prophesy is predicted by Scripture. (It is saddening to

see that some of the things that are mentioned in these very verses are being promoted as doctrines in the church today – the love for self is promoted under the guise of self-esteem, the love for money is encouraged by the teachings of the Prosperity gospel and a lack of self control leads to drunkenness in the spirit.)

What is mystical spiritual warfare? Many Christians are involved in a type of spiritual warfare whereby through intercession, the strongholds of “territorial spirits” over certain areas are identified, named, bound and pulled down through united prayer. The victory obtained in this way over these spirits is then supposed to enable believers to “take towns and cities for Jesus.” Those who are involved also believe that greater power can be exerted by getting all the denominations of a particular area to participate. The victory that is thought to have been won is often then celebrated by having a combined victory march through the streets of that particular town or city.

The dedication and sincerity of most of those involved cannot be questioned. Their enthusiasm and zeal is an example to all of us. But is what they are doing Biblical? Is it effective and does it have any real spiritual power? The existence of territorial spirits cannot be denied. Daniel 10:12-13 makes mention of the Prince of Persia who resisted the angel of God. When that angel was gone we read of another spirit or angel, the Prince of Greece, taking its place. Note, however, that not once do we read that Daniel addressed any of these princes directly with a “You prince of Persia I bind you and pull you down.” Furthermore, nowhere in the New Testament do we read that any of the apostles, before entering Ephesus, Corinth, Athens or Rome, cities known for their idols and false gods, first had to pull down strongholds or bind the strongman of Artemis, the spirit of Diana, or any other demon.

Something that I often did and which is quite a common practice amongst Christians, is the binding of Satan. This practice bothered me for a long time because I realised that something was not working. If there was any spiritual power in this and if it really worked then we would have had heaven on earth already, because Satan would have been rendered ineffective. Today, however, I realise that he can be bound by God only, and that he is being allowed by God to be god of this world until his appointed time, when he will be bound and thrown into the lake of burning sulphur (1 John 5:19, Revelation 20).

But doesn't the Bible say that we can bind and loose on earth? Again we see how a traditionally wrong interpretation of a scripture has misguided believers for a long time. The Amplified Bible helps us to understand Matthew 18:18 correctly; *"Truly, I tell you, whatever you forbid and declare to be improper and unlawful on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit and declare proper and lawful on earth must be already permitted in heaven."* It is clear from the context that this verse refers to the decisions of the church when conflicts and disputes between members of the body have to be settled. Believers should not go to secular courts to settle disputes amongst themselves (1 Corinthians 6). The church has the responsibility to resolve conflicts amongst believers with God's help and by discerning what is right and wrong by applying the principles of His Word. The context of this scripture shows that it has nothing to do with the binding or loosing of demons.

In conclusion, the devil does not mind if Christians keep themselves busy with exciting things that have no real spiritual power and that can do no real harm to his kingdom!

Biblical Spiritual Warfare

In dealing with this subject it is important to keep the following facts in mind; the Bible says that our fight is not against flesh and blood but against “the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Here we are in agreement with those who apply mystical spiritual warfare. Spiritual beings need physical organs through which to manifest in a physical environment. The evil thoughts of demonic beings have no influence in the realm of the physical, unless they can do it through the use of a human mind. James is conscious of this when he writes: “...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 1:13-14). Peter, having the same thing in mind, warns: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled;...and alert. (a state of mind) *Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him...*” (1 Peter 1:13, 5:8).

The Bible gives us several examples of people who had their minds influenced by thoughts injected from sources which were not from God. After Peter’s declaration that he would never allow Jesus to be taken and killed, Jesus’ reply was: “*Out of my sight, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men*” (Matthew 16:23). Here we have a case of what is called the law of double reference – a human being is looked at, but an invisible entity is being addressed! Judas is another example mentioned in the Bible of someone who allowed Satan to seriously influence his mind (John 13:27). Eve is the classic example.

The strongholds mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 are “*arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the true knowledge of*

God” (Amplified Bible, my emphasis). From the context of the scripture references we can see what these forces have in mind – to alienate people from the truth concerning spiritual things. The mind is the seat of all knowledge. The enemy, who knows this, therefore aims to build strongholds in it in the form of thoughts, opinions, arguments, doctrines and philosophies which are contrary to the truth of God’s Word. The Bible does not call the devil the father of lies for nothing. This strategy of Satan is confirmed by scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:21: “*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers...*” and “*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds.*” The battle for the mind still rages on. True spiritual warfare therefore must be involved in the pulling down of these strongholds of erroneous thinking in the minds of people that blinds them to Divine truth. In this there is nothing mystical.

What is God’s strategy? He gives the believer His full armour. “*Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes*” (Ephesians 6:11). Note that “*full*” implies nothing else is needed!

THE FULL ARMOUR OF GOD

The Belt of Truth

So much depends on a soldier’s belt. Should it loosen, many other things fall to the ground. In similar fashion, what happens when the church, called the “*pillar and foundation of truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15) starts shaking? The church has the Word of God which contains what is needed for “*teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The church is warned not to be carried

away by all kinds of strange teachings because especially in end times, many will follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (Hebrews 13:9, 1 Timothy 4:1).

One of the main functions of the Holy Spirit is to teach believers divine truth, not to entertain the senses. *“when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth”* (Joh.16:13). But Jesus sets a condition: *“If you continue in my word...then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32).

A word of caution – truth is not determined by signs and wonders, but by what has already been declared by God in His Word. What you believe is called doctrine. More and more we hear the popular cry: “Doctrines divide!” The opposite is true – it is false doctrine that brings division!

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer when he accepts the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. The Gospel freely gives a repentant sinner a perfect standing with God. However, one should be careful that this standing is not brought under condemnation because one refuses to fall in line with all sorts of unscriptural traditions and new things happening in the church. The believer’s righteousness is based on relying on the merit of the One who died for us, not by complying with the rules and regulations of *“self-imposed”* worship (Colossians 2:20-23). I grew up with the idea that it was a sin to shop, go swimming or mow the lawn on a Sunday. I was taught that it was the Sabbath and that it had to be kept holy. By not discerning the new dispensation that started with Christ’s death, concepts like tithing, keeping the Sabbath, respect for a priestly class, respect for a building as the “house of God” and abstaining from certain kinds of food, are

examples of things, brought over from the Old Testament, which put people in bondage.

“Firm-footed Stability...produced by the Gospel”
(Amplified Bible)

Often, because we feel sorry for people in need, instead of presenting the Gospel as God-centric, we subtly reduce it to become human-centric. In our representation of the Gospel we often jump in with “God has a wonderful plan for your life” and fail to emphasise the importance of obedience to God’s revealed will. We sometimes lead spiritual seekers to accept Jesus, without explaining to them that **true repentance means the end of the self-life**. People are led to accept Jesus, but are not told how they must change so that Jesus can accept them. We concentrate on the sinners need, instead of on unconditional surrender to the will of God. We often neglect to explain to people what the Word of God teaches about the rebellious nature of fallen man. **The only way a sinner can appreciate the good news of the Gospel is by first hearing the bad news about himself.**

A.W. Tozer puts it so well: *“All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life...and...a new evangelical technique – a new type of meeting and a new type of preaching. The new cross, if understood aright, is the source of oceans of clean good fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference...The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. The old cross is a symbol of death. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life. God offers*

life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross.”

The modern tendency to make churches more seeker-friendly causes the meetings to cater more and more for satisfying the senses. In some meetings where hardly a sound word of Gospel truth is preached, many are influenced to “accept” Jesus by fantastic performances and manifestations. Some are even misled to believe that they had received the Holy Spirit because they had experienced all sorts of physical manifestations like hot flushes, shakings and warm feelings. In meetings where responses are manipulated by making an appeal to the senses and the emotions, people can get converted by by-passing their minds and will. A conversion and an apparent spiritual experience can sometimes be purely psychological and have no spiritual dimension at all. This type of conversion is not only limited to Christianity. All over the world people are continually converted to support various philosophies and causes. By using certain psychological laws people can be influenced to experience radical changes in their feelings and outlook in life. In China, after the revolution, large student meetings were held and emotional appeals swept thousands into the kingdom of Moa Tse Tung. Young communistic converts gave testimonies and joyfully sang songs and testified that a new purpose and commitment had come to their lives. But were they reborn by the Spirit of God? How must Christian conversions take place? The Biblical approach was to first address people’s understanding by statements of spiritual truth from the Word of God (Ephesians 1:13). *“We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience...”* (2 Corinthians 4:2). Through this method the emotions were also affected and it was left to the will to respond with a decision

for Christ. **The order is important: understanding, conscience, emotions, will.** It is dangerous to appeal directly to the emotions. Real conversion is a change that takes place after a commitment made as result of a response of the mind to Gospel truth (Romans 12:1-2). When people realise that they have sinned against a holy God or that they are in error, consciences are pricked and emotions are aroused. Christian conversion is a change of attitude by the sowing of the living seed of the Word of God in the mind of a person. By the Spirit of God, a new spiritual birth then takes place. **The responsibility of the believer witnessing for the Lord, is to proclaim Biblical truth.** The Gospel must be explained clearly. There is no place for psychological manipulation and sensational tricks. *“We refuse to practise cunning...”* (2 Corinthians 4:2). This is the trap that converted celebrities must watch out for when doing evangelistic work. Do people, especially the youth, accept Christ through being persuaded by Gospel truth or because their hero from the sports or entertainment world has decided to follow Jesus? And those who try to make the Gospel more palatable to human nature by associating it with rich and easy living, make themselves guilty of the same thing – catering for the senses.

The Shield of Faith

The Biblical norm is for the believer to live by a faith that is based on the Word of God. It needs no confirmation from the realm of the senses (2 Corinthians 5:7). Through faith we know that Christ dwells in our hearts. Faith rests assured of the fact that He promised: *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5). Signs, manifestations, miracles and bodily sensations, because they belong to the realm of the

senses and because of the danger of the counterfeit, can never be trusted as proof of the presence of God.

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet speaks symbolically of a renewed mind – a mind renewed as a result of the influence of God’s Word. Some are of the opinion that the mind cannot be considered when it comes to spiritual things like preaching and teaching because it is darkened and fallen. The New Testament apostles were of a different opinion. Words used in the Book of Acts to describe their preaching and teaching refer to an appeal to the intellect e.g. *didasko* (to teach, Acts 19:9), *sunécheon* (to confound, Acts 9:22), *dialegomai* (to reason, to argue, Acts 17:2), *diakatelégchomai* (to overcome thoroughly in disputation, Acts 18:28), *peitho* (to persuade and to convince, Acts 19:9). Therefore we read that as a result of this didactic preaching people were “persuaded” (Acts 17:4, 18:4, 19:8, 26, 28:23, 24). They sought to convince their hearers in order to convert them. Through their preaching they sought to pull down strongholds in the minds of their hearers. This approach to spiritual warfare is confirmed by what Paul did in Ephesus. Instead of mystical methods he argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus, some translations add, “*from about ten o’clock till three*” (five hours daily!), “*for two years*” (Acts 19:9-10, Amplified Bible). A further confirmation of the fact that apostolic preaching contained much intellectual content is the fact that conversion is often referred to as a response, not to Christ, but to truth (“*...believing the truth*” 2 Thessalonians 2:10-13, “*...acknowledging the truth*” 2 Timothy 2:25, “*...obeying the truth*” 1 Peter 1:22, Galatians 5:7, “*...coming to know the truth*” John 8:32, 1 Timothy 2:4.)

The ignorance in appreciating the role that the understanding of Biblical truth plays in spiritual development is demonstrated by the answer given by a well-known man ministering on a world-wide platform – to defend strange antics taking place in his meetings he says: “God is offending our minds so that He can reach our hearts.” It is difficult to understand how people can be encouraged to by-pass sound thinking in order to get drunk in the spirit so as to “experience more of God”. Some would like to refer to Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus as an example of where the mind was by-passed in conversion. However, his asking God what He wanted him to do, shows that Paul knew exactly what was going on (Acts 9:6).

There is a laziness amongst many Christians when it comes to taking up the Bible and making a sound intellectual study to find out for themselves what Scripture says. Perhaps some of the things that people view as controversial in this book will be treated in the same way.

The Sword of the Spirit

Real spiritual warfare is coming against wrong ideas and concepts about God and His Word. They must be demolished with truth and love. The Word is called the sword of the Spirit and it must be wielded. Unfortunately the Sword has lost much of its sharpness and authority in the church and in many circles you try in vein to settle an argument by quoting from Scripture. The place that the written Word should have in the life of the believer has been seriously eroded by the authority given to the subjective utterances and teachings of modern-day prophets. Believers must get to know the written Word for themselves in order to cut away that which is soulish and demonic (Hebrews 4:12).

Prayer

All forms of prayer in line with God's revealed will are very important. Through prayer we should make all our needs known to God. The Bible says we do not have because we do not ask.

Amongst the new brand of Christians are those who believe in taking control of everything through prayer. One should be careful – prayers aimed at taking control of someone else's thoughts verge on the manipulative principles of the occult. One can only take one's own thoughts captive. Yes, we must pray – we must ask the Holy Spirit to use our preaching, teaching and witnessing to pull down strongholds of traditions, philosophies and arguments that set themselves up against the true knowledge of God.

Conclusion

In the light of all the warnings given in Scripture against the schemes of Satan and end-time deception, a believer cannot afford to be gullible. He should be alert at all times. He will have to use every component of his spiritual armour in order to contend for the faith which was handed down through Scripture. Importantly, the responsibility to discern truth lies with the individual.

15

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ON THE CROSS

The Real Passion of Christ

For many years I could not fully appreciate communion services. Even when good speakers vividly described how Jesus was beaten and mistreated, I had a sense of guilt because it was as if I could not properly appreciate his pain and suffering. I think it was because I realised that Jesus was executed by means of a common Roman crucifixion. It was the ordinary way in which criminals were dealt with in most of the ancient countries of those days. The fact that two other robbers were crucified with Him testifies to this fact. According to the Biblical account they spat in his face, struck Him with their fists, slapped and whipped Him. The guards made a crown of thorns which they stuck on His head and just before they crucified Him, they beat him with a reed. The Romans had no real reason to take vengeance on Jesus; He had done nothing to them. Even Pilate, their governor, had declared Him innocent, but because of the uproar of the Jews, he gave in to their will. The Jews were the ones who had a bone to pick with Him. According to their law He had blasphemed and had to be killed. For the Roman soldiers, I suppose, it was merely routine. Just another crucifixion.

Jesus was not the only one to have experienced pain while being physically mistreated. Throughout history we read of many men and women who had suffered terribly while being tortured. Many believers have suffered cruel deaths by having their bodies torn apart by wild animals, some were thrown into boiling oil and others had their skin pulled off their bodies whilst alive! In Hebrews 11 we read of others that were sawn in two! It was one of the things that bothered Richard Wurmbrand; he thought that some of the Christians in Communistic jails had suffered more during torture than Jesus.

What was it about Jesus' suffering that I was missing?

One evening after a Bible study I was asked the question: "How did Jesus bear our sins?" I could not immediately give a clear answer. I turned to 1 Peter 2:24. For years I had read it from a human-centric point of view. The emphasis had been on "me", "you" and "we"; "*He himself bore **our** sins in his body on the tree, so that **we** ...by his wounds **you** have been healed.*" That evening, in my understanding, the emphasis shifted to; "***He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...***" (My emphasis). Now the attention was on what Jesus had to suffer and on what He had to bear in His body.

To me there had always been a discrepancy between the way pictures portray Jesus on the cross and the way that the Bible describes Him while suffering. In Psalm 22 we find some of these Biblical pictures of Jesus on the cross. Most Bible commentators agree that Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm in which a prophetic description is given of Jesus on the cross. Verses 16 and 18 must be a reference to Jesus, because at no stage in his life did David, the psalm writer, have his hands and feet pierced as in crucifixion ("*...they have pierced my hands and feet*") or were lots cast for his clothing. ("*They*

divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”) This is what happened to Jesus during His crucifixion. If such fine prophetic detail about His clothes came true, then surely the other prophetic detail given in this psalm about His physical body, would also have become a reality on the cross. Consider the following pictures given of Jesus on the cross as found in this prophetic psalm. In verse 14 we read that all His bones were out of joint. Verse 17 says that you could count all His bones. What pictures come up in your mind whilst reading these words? I have seen photo’s of people in Ethiopia who died of hunger and sickness – they were emaciated to such an extent that you could literally count the ribs and see every other bone in their body. They were literally a bag of bones. You could count every bone!

Look what Jesus looked like on the cross as portrayed in Isaiah 52:14; “... *his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness...*” If words have meaning it means that Jesus’ appearance must have changed in such a way that He did not look like a human being! How could this have happened by the mistreatment of an ordinary Roman crucifixion?

Roman soldiers were renowned for their courage and bravery and for them to show fear was a disgrace. Why were those who were guarding the body of Jesus during crucifixion suddenly **terrified** when they saw “*all that was happening?*” (Matt.27:54, Amplified Bible).

Unless one understands the concept of substitution, one cannot properly understand the suffering of Jesus on the cross. We find the explanation in Isaiah 53:5: “*The **punishment** that brought us peace was upon him...*” What was Jesus punished for? Although He was sinless, He was punished for the sin of the world. On Him the wrath of God came down for all the vilest deeds imaginable – murder, rape, robbery, sodomy,

deception, adultery... our sin had to be atoned for, either in us in hell or in Jesus on the cross.

Then there is the matter of His becoming a curse so that we could be set free from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). What curse? Through Adam's sin a curse came upon all men. The curse was spiritual death (Romans 5:12-17). Furthermore, when the law was given to Moses and Israel, God promised that they would be blessed if they fully obeyed it, but numerous curses were listed for those who disobeyed (Deuteronomy 28). Because God is righteous, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. For us to say we have been redeemed implies that Jesus had to suffer every single curse pronounced by God for the breaking of His Law.

One of the consequences of sin is to be separated from God. On the cross Jesus cried out in a loud voice: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"* The spiritual agony that He had to go through started in Gethsemane where the Bible says He was *"overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death"* (Matthew 26:38). The Bible says that His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:42-44). We have all experienced intense disappointment, sorrow, disillusionment and pain; **multiply these with the feelings of the population of the world and put it in the spirit of one man, and you can only start to imagine the agony of Jesus.**

In order for Jesus to be a substitute meant that He had to suffer each one of the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy 28 **in** His body on the cross. Imagine in your minds eye a person hanging on a cross and suddenly in the space of three hours His body is struck by wasting disease (remember being able to count his bones, Psalm 22), fever, inflammation, boils, tumours, festering sores, the itch... just to mention a few of the things listed as curses in Deuteronomy 28:15-68. No wonder the prophet saw Him so disfigured that you could not

recognise him as a human being. What did He really look like as the wrath and punishment of God came into His body and spirit? – surely He must have become an object of horror!

It was no ordinary Roman crucifixion! The earth started shaking, graves tore open and the bodies of some holy people came to life (Matthew 27:51-53)! For three hours darkness came upon the whole land. No wonder that God had to show us what really happened through the eyes of His prophets. The Roman soldiers who were used to seeing people suffer on crosses in the usual way, suddenly saw something in the gloom that terrified them and made them cry out: “*Surely he was the Son of God!*” **They saw what those standing afar off could not see – the wrath of the Father, meant for sinners, coming upon the body of His Son, transforming it into an object of horror.** He was stricken, smitten, He was afflicted, crushed, “*the punishment that brought us peace was upon him...*” (Isaiah 53:4-5). That is what carrying the punishment for sin did to Him! “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What about all the negative things that still happen to Christians? If we have been set free why do so many things that we see listed as curses still come across our way? It is not easy to give one simplistic answer, but one thing is for sure, our Father will not put anything on us that His Son had to pay for dearly on the cross. We either brought it on ourselves or our enemy is responsible. Take sickness as an example. How can you pray for someone’s healing if he is of the opinion that it is God’s will for him to be sick? The prayer is then directly against the will of God. And why does such a person take medicine or go to the doctor? That would also be against God’s will. Every doctor and nurse would then be in rebellion against God. However, if you believe that God’s will for you

is to be healed, you can thank him for every gift of grace given to alleviate pain and sickness – in the first place, prayer (James 5:14). “*Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray for him...*” It does not say that they should first find out if it is God’s will for the person to be sick; it says to pray for his healing.

The Bread and the Cup

We are right back to where we started from at the beginning of this book – the symbols of the bread and the cup.

*“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ (Do you notice the words “**which is for you**”?) In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the **body and the blood** of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without **recognizing the body** of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself. **That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep** (died). But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement” (1 Corinthians 11:23-32, The emphasis is mine).*

The above quotation contains one of the most radical statements made in Scripture. One is even hesitant to discuss the implications of what is written in it, but because it is part

of God's Word we have no choice but to confront ourselves with it. Paul says the reason why some Christians are sick and weak and why some have even died is because the body of the Lord is not discerned during communion – put in other words, because what really happened to Jesus on the cross is not understood.

I have heard sermons explaining that when we do not recognise our brothers and sisters by forgiving them and by living in harmony with them, we do not recognise or discern them as the Body of Christ and are therefore sinning against Him. Before partaking of communion, time is often given for the making of restitution. Although I believe that asking forgiveness and making restitution is important, I do not think that this interpretation is in keeping with the context of the quoted Scripture. Why do I say so? Although it is true that Scripture refers to all believers as being the Body of Christ, I do not know of one verse referring to us as being his blood. (*“Therefore, whoever eats...and drinks... in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body **and the blood** of the Lord.”*) The context can only be a reference to the suffering of Jesus in His physical body on the cross.

How can believers partake of the bread and the cup in a way that can have such serious repercussions? By not acknowledging what Scripture says happened to Jesus. Films and pictures of the sufferings of Jesus can evoke emotional reactions, but we are dependent on the Spirit of God to use what God allowed David and Isaiah to see through their prophetic eyes, to make it real to us.

On the substitutionary work of Jesus on the cross rests the power of the New Testament, through which, by faith and by the grace of God, flows every blessing of our rich inheritance in Christ Jesus.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

16

THE CHURCH AS SEEN THROUGH THE TORN VEIL

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 3:10).

As it has already been explained in this book, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ is made up of people who have spiritually been born again. They are called the Body of Christ. Jesus is the Head and the individual believers are the members. (Like members of a physical body, not like members of a club or of an organisation.) It is therefore not a building complex that you can go to on a Sunday. Most of the members of the Body of Christ are sitting in religious institutions all over the world. Many say that we are splitting hairs about terminology when we insist on the correct usage of the word “church”. A.W. Tozer says: *“Meanings are expressed in words, but it is one of the misfortunes of life that words tend to persist long after their meanings have departed, with the result that thoughtless men and women believe that they have reality, because they have the word for it.”* Richard Wurmbrand expresses it like this: *“Words, which were first formed for naming surrounding realities, become emptied, with time, of their original meaning. Retarded souls continue to accord them the same value and respect as when they had*

rich content. They don't realise that they are now merely outwardly, beautiful dolls, stuffed with straw."

In the Bible "church" meant a warm, vibrant organism in which the Holy Spirit was the life blood. For many today it means a formal organisation that you can join and go to on a Sunday.

Why did Jesus, nearly three hundred years before anything looking like a religious institution existed, say that where two or three gathered in his Name, He would be in their midst? What is the difference between His presence when two or three are gathered in his Name and His presence when I am sitting alone in my room? To answer this we have to refer to Ephesians 4:8–16 which says: *"When he ascended on high, he...gave gifts to men...It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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."*

Nobody in himself, can at the same time, be an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or a teacher. Jesus Christ wants to minister to His people by giving them gifts of ministry. Alone we have limited spiritual gifts, but when two or three or many believers get together, we are exposed to the spiritual gifts of our brothers and sisters. In a special way we get built up, comforted and strengthened by their ministry. This is the context of Hebrews 10:25, *"Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another."*

The purpose of all corporate activity of the church is spiritual growth; growing in faith, growing in character and growing in the knowledge of the Word.

Today we find that many believers are getting together in spontaneous fellowship outside the formal organised denominations. Those who are looking in from the outside shake their heads and cannot understand that people who say that they belong to no institutional structure still call themselves “church.”

What about formal structure? There are relatively few scriptures that can be used to justify certain forms of church government. In contrast, there are pages and pages of clear, unambiguous instructions teaching us about spiritual truth and how to live a God-pleasing life. Is this not an indication that God is not so much concerned about structure as He is about spiritual growth? Christianity, which initially was a simplistic way of life, has through the years been pressed into institutional moulds. Anyone who is interested enough can go to the library and read up for himself how institutional “churchianity” started and developed. For the sake of interest we will highlight a few facts. For about the first three hundred years after the death of Christ, nothing existed that looked like a religious institution. The Christian faith spread all over the Roman Empire as the early disciples went out with a simple declaration: Jesus is alive and He is Lord. In spite of terrible persecution, many accepted the Christian faith. In about 312 A.D. Constantine, the Roman emperor, received a vision of a cross with the words *In hoc signo vinces* (In this sign you will be victorious) and knowing that his soldiers were very superstitious, he had them painted on their shields. In the ensuing battle they came out as the conquerors. In thankfulness to the Christian God whom he associated with the cross, he proclaimed the Christian religion lawful and later even called himself *pontifex maximus* – head of the church. (Die Kirche lebt / Die Lebende Kerk, G.S.Wegener) Christians, who up to that stage had been persecuted from all

sides, suddenly found their religion to be the religion of the state. Out of this situation grew the Mother of all institutions, the Roman Catholic Church.

17

What now?

Christians are being conditioned to become used to the idea that all the different religions of the world are worshipping the same god. More and more we hear of Christian leaders getting together with leaders of other religions to discuss a new type of spirituality and a new kind of universal faith that they believe will help bring about world peace. Christian bookshops are being flooded with books that are subtly promoting this new type of thinking. Even in modern “translations” of the Bible, terminology is adapted to accommodate the Eastern and New Age philosophy of “God is in everyone and in everything.” An incident which greatly advanced this new idea of an universal faith was the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers building in New York. Some American leaders, who up to that stage had taken a weak stance against the banning of Bible reading and prayer in public schools, suddenly, after the attack, publically took

hands with Muslim priests, Hindu gurus, Buddhists, Catholic priests, liberals, and even witches, to pray for peace on earth! In the book, From the ashes: A Spiritual Response to the Attack on America, articles by Christian ministers like T.D.Jakes, Rick Warren, Bruce Wilkenson, Charles Colson, Max Lucado and Billy Graham, appear side by side with articles written by New Age writers and ministers like Neale Donald Walsch, the Dalai Lama and Starhawk, the witch. In his article Walsch addresses all the other contributors with these words: **“We must...build a new society...We must do so with new spiritual truths. We must preach a new gospel...We are all one...”** Not one of the Christian leaders made use of this opportunity to correct him as far as the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned.

As result of the fact that so many Christians do not seriously consider the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, many unscriptural doctrines have taken root in the church. The few who dare to challenge this situation are criticised as being judgemental. This indifference shown by most towards Biblical truth has conditioned Christians to such an extent that they are now ready for the great falling away predicted in Scripture (1 Tim.4:1, 2 Thess.2:3). They are, whether they realize it or not, helping to set the stage for the implementing of the man-made, New Order kingdom on earth. This is something that those Christian ministers and leaders who are preaching Dominionism and “Kingdom Now” must seriously consider. Christian preachers who are preaching a popular seeker-friendly gospel to attract the masses, must also seriously reflect whether they are preparing their hearers for what the Bible predicts is going to happen in end times. Often Christians are not so much being misled by what is being preached, **as by what is not being preached**. In not wanting to sound negative, many preachers are presenting a watered

down version of the radical gospel message of salvation as found in Scripture. Under the influence of some of the preachers and teachers of the Emerging Church, even the Gospel is being redefined. Consider the following brazen quote from Alan Jones' book, *Re-imagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit without Disconnecting Your Mind*: “*The Churches’ fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of the cross must be reimagined in the Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it*” (p.23).

In the light of all the spiritual developments taking place, it would serve us well to remember Jude’s serious words of warning in Jude 1:3 to earnestly “*contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*”

What now?

In order to prevent oneself from falling into deception, one should seek fellowship with other brothers and sisters who also love truth and who are also in submission to what the Bible teaches. Ultimately, though, each believer will have to study the Word for himself in order to decide what to believe. One of the tragic consequences of the traditional model of the church is that, even after having attended church meetings for many years, most Christians still have to rely on what their minister or pastor tells them. Paul states that after a certain time, all believers should have the knowledge to enable them to become teachers of the Word (Heb.5:12).

The “Gift” of Reading

A very common concept amongst Christians is that only certain learned men can understand the Bible. It was not what

Paul believed, for to the Corinthians he wrote: *“For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand”* (2 Cor.1:13). Some of the letters that he wrote to them form part of our New Testament. Christians must understand that the New Testament was written, not to confuse us, but to guide and instruct us. With the wonderful “gift” of reading we can read for ourselves what the Word of God has to say. The individual believer has no excuse for not studying it for himself, especially considering the promise that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 14:25, 1 John 2:27). Isn’t it also true that Jesus once said that certain things that were hidden from the learned, would be revealed to little children? (Matt.11:25).

The Ministry of the Different Parts of the Body

When Christians start reading and studying the Bible for themselves, an immediate need for sharing with other believers, arises. Unfortunately, many believers who belong to formal institutions, because of the fear of being ostracised, feel that they do not have the liberty to openly question some of the doctrinal issues that are bothering them. Many are therefore attracted to informal groups where they can enjoy open fellowship with other Christians who are not caught up in rigid structures. In such spontaneous fellowship much spiritual growth takes place around the studying of the Word. As more and more pressure is being exerted on religious institutions to become part of the world-wide ecumenical movement, the church, like in the days of old, will once again, spontaneously and independently, grow according to New Testament principles. In this process every individual believer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has an important part to play. Paul’s encouragement is still applicable today: *“When you*

come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Cor.14:26, My emphasis). “From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph.4:16). Paul goes on and he writes to the believers in Rome: “I myself am convinced, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (Romans 15:14, My emphasis).

The Structure of the New Testament Church

Paul places much emphasis on the Christian husband and wife relationship in order to explain an important spiritual truth concerning the church. Under God, their Creator, husband and wife, from the beginning, have had the responsibility to represent Him on earth (Gen.2:15-25). Paul confirms this Godly purpose by a mystery that he shares in one of his letters; the marriage relationship should be an example of the relationship between Christ and His church (Eph.5:1-32). In Genesis we read that God saw that it was not good for the man, Adam, to be alone. He therefore gave him a suitable companion. From this we can deduct that it was God’s purpose that they had to fulfil each other’s needs. They were therefore dependent on each other for the fulfilment of all their social and biological needs. Seen from a Biblical perspective, this principle is still applicable to this present day. The husband-wife-family relationship should form the core of the Christian community. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God and your neighbour as yourself. If you are married, your closest “neighbour” is your wife, or your husband, and your children.

The importance of the family in God's scheme of things is shown by the fact that qualification for spiritual leadership in the church is rooted in the family. To be a spiritual leader, according to the Bible, a man must firstly be able to manage his own family well. At the same time he should also enjoy their loyalty and respect (1 Tim. 3:2-5). One of the most important responsibilities of a Christian husband is to look after his family, especially if he is to be seen as a leader in the church. Listen to these harsh words concerning this topic: *"If anyone does not provide for his own relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever"* (1 Tim.5:8). It is a matter of great concern to see how many church leaders do not understand this principle. So often the marriages of pastors and ministers are placed under great stress, because the interests of the institution gets more attention than their own families. Is this the reason why we so often hear of high profile marriages breaking up?

Together with the principle of where two or three believers are gathered, the family, under the priesthood of the father, is the other smallest form of the Christian congregation in action. As result of the traditional emphasis on the "one-man" form of ministry, many men, as far as ministry is concerned, have been kept in spiritual nappies. This has resulted in a situation where there are not enough spiritual father-figures in our towns and cities whose homes are open for fellowship and where the spiritual "homeless" can be accommodated.

Because the forces of evil understand what an important role the Christian family should play in the development of children and individuals, it forms a focal point of their evil intentions. They will exploit any situation to create tension between husband and wife in order to try and destroy the family. The fact that both husband and wife are Christians is

still no guarantee that there will be no problems in the marriage. The most important principle that couples must understand is that the Bible teaches that they should love one another in the same way that Jesus loved His church. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her...”* (Eph.5:25). We should follow Jesus’ example, not that of Hollywood! How did Jesus show His love for His church? Our well-known proverb “to sweat blood,” which expresses a situation of intense discomfort, comes from the greatest deed of love we know of – Christ’s suffering which started in Gethsemane and ended on the cross. The meaning of this type of love which God expects to exist between husband and wife, I learned in a very special way. One evening, years ago, just before we had to go to a prayer meeting, my wife and I had a slight “misunderstanding.” Because of our argument, my wife decided to stay at home and I, being one of the pastors of our church, although still in a very bad mood, had to go. After the meeting, on my way to my car, I was intercepted by old “oom” John, who pressed a bunch of lovely red flowers into my hand telling me it was for my wife, Elsa. Arriving at home, ill-humoured and sulky as ever, I had to knock on the front door for my wife to open from the inside. Guess what the first thing was that caught her eye as she opened the door? You are right – the bunch of bright red flowers in my hand. She took the flowers and thinking that they were from me, thanked and embraced me and skipping down the passage, looking for a vase, our argument was completely forgotten. Realizing what had happened, I allowed considerable time to elapse before I informed her that the flowers had not really come from me, but from uncle John. We both learned a valuable lesson that evening concerning God’s command to love one another.

I had often wondered, if the love that the Bible talks about is an emotion, how is it possible that it can be commanded? *“Husbands, love your wives”* (Eph.5:25). That evening, for the first time, I experienced that the New Testament Greek word for love, *agapé*, meant a wilful act of goodwill for the sake of somebody else’s happiness. It is not the doer of the benevolent act that experiences the emotion of love, but the receiver of it! No wonder my wife reacted in such a loving way! God’s kind of love gives; *“For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son”* (John 3:16, My emphasis). We can experience the love of God, but his Son had to “sweat blood” to make it possible. In the same way we should be willing to subject ourselves to much discomfort in order for others to experience God’s kind of love. This is also confirmed by what Jesus taught: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). It would be heaven on earth if all people treated each other in this way! It is the father’s most important responsibility, in obedience to the Word of God, to see to it that he loves his family and that he makes them happy and sometimes, in order to do this, he is going to have to “sweat blood.”

Friends

The fulfilment that one experiences through happy family relationships, should further be complimented by warm bonds of spontaneous friendship. Jesus emphasized the importance of friends by saying that no one has greater love than to lay down his life for them (John 15:12-15). In the New Testament we see that the emphasis is on friendship and discipleship, not on membership. We must prayerfully seek to make friends with those who come across our way. It is interesting to note how often Jesus, when meeting up with people, arranged to

have a meal with them. Experience has shown how friendships can develop as people share over a cup of tea, around a “braaivleis” fire or while having a meal together. Much spiritual growth takes place as believers share in this type of spontaneous setting. The only problem with this form of “ministry” is that nobody can make friends on your behalf; you can only do it yourself.

The formal religious institutions recognize the importance of the smaller groups, thus the weekly cells. Unfortunately, some times the emphasis is not on spontaneous friendship, but on organizational growth and the achievement of the visions and goals of the institution.

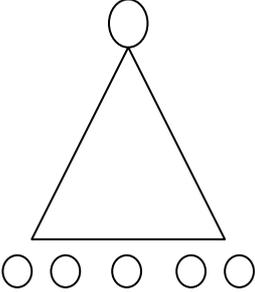
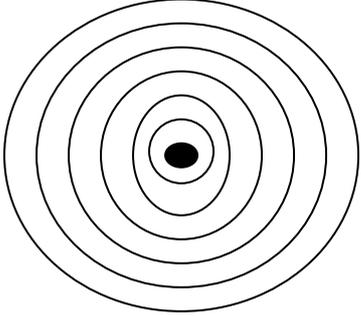
Congregation

We have already made reference to the fact that Jesus stated that where two or three believers are gathered in His name, He would be in their midst. Reading the New Testament, it seems that, under influence of the Holy Spirit, it is a natural tendency for believers to want to come together. But the fact that the believers in the early church came together in such a wide variety of places, seems to indicate that the type of place for gathering did not get much attention in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. At first they came together in the temple; probably in one of the porches that was open to the public (Acts 2:46). They then also started gathering in homes (Acts 2:46, 5:42, Rom. 16:5, Philemon 2, Col. 4:15). We read that Paul also had regular meetings in the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). Other believers even gathered in the open air (Acts 16:13). This free “structure” accommodated thousands of believers who came together in meetings (In Acts 2:41 it is described how three thousand people were converted in one day!)

It is the Holy Spirit who places the desire in the hearts of God's people to want to get together. Fellowship is a wonderful privilege, but to grow spiritually and to obey the Word of God remains the responsibility of the individual believer.

Conclusion

A high price in terms of commitment, time and money, is being paid to keep the traditional model of the church running. Can it spiritually be afforded to allow wrong church traditions and teachings to keep the people of God in bondage, preventing them from fully experiencing their inheritance in Christ.

<p style="text-align: center;">A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF THE CHURCH AND THE INSTITUTION</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">The Institution</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Biblical Model</p>
	
<p>1. The Structure: A pyramid form with a hierarchy of authority, organised like a corporation.</p>	<p>1. Like a pebble in a pool. It is an informal family and called "<i>the household of God</i>". "<i>Our Father</i>" (Eph.2:19)</p>
<p>2. In charge at the top: a man in a position of authority, over the people. The title is important.</p>	<p>2. Father figures who are leaders amongst the people (1 Pet.5:1-5). No titles for Jesus said: "<i>For you are not to be called rabbi.</i>"</p>

	(Matt.23:8).
3. Leadership – a man is appointed in a position. He might or might not have spiritual authority. The position gives him authority.	3. Because a man has spiritual maturity, he is recognised. Leadership is recognised, not organised. Leadership is functional, not positional.
4. In terms of qualifications for leadership and ministry, the emphasis is on professional and academic qualifications acquired by studying at recognised denominational institutions.	4. Leadership grows out of discipleship. Biblical qualifications: How is he in the home and how is he in society? Must have sound knowledge of the Word (Titus 1:6-9, 1 Tim. 3:1-15).
5. Ministry has become a profession.	5. Life and life-style must be a ministry
6. Chain of authority downwards – authority flow charts.	6. Subject one to another (Eph.5:21). Voluntary submission out of respect for maturity (Phil.2:5-7).
7. A broad base of laity has to carry the system with time, commitment and money.	7. The ministries serve the body (Eph.4:11).
8. Money necessary for the existence of the system. Pay tithes and offerings to build funds.	8. The church needs money in order to live. Giving meets the needs of people. Giving to build character, not to build funds.

9. A sharp distinction between clergy and laity.	9. The Priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5).
10. The building complex the centre of attraction. By some often wrongly called “the House of God”.	10. The body is the spiritual house – life itself is the arena of action.
11. Meeting orientated. The programme is important to keep people motivated. Mostly the lecturer, orator, audience model.	11. Sense of community. Discipling and maturing through fellowship and friendship. In the meetings all must contribute in ministry according to 1 Cor. 14.
12. You join and belong to the institution, becoming an official member through paperwork giving you the right to privileges and membership.	12. You get spiritually reborn into the universal church of Christ. You give one another the “ <i>right hand of fellowship.</i> ” (Gal.2:9)
13. Success often measured in numbers and programmes presented in meetings in a very formal, organised way.	13. Success measured in growth in character and meaningful relationships.
14. Division caused by being divided into denominations, organisations and institutions. Always trying to organise unity externally. For the sake of “unity” and “love” discussion of any doctrine expressing Biblical truth that may cause	14. Recognises the unity of the body of Christ. “ <i>There is one body and one Spirit one hope...one Lord...one faith...one baptism...one God and Father...</i> ” (Eph. 4:3-6). We reach unity of the faith through spiritual development through

contention is avoided when coming together in meetings promoting “unity”.	knowledge of the Word (Eph.4:11-16). Commanded to keep the unity of the Spirit (Eph.4:3).
15. They want the world in the church as members.	15. Want the church in the world as an influence.

EPILOGUE

It does not matter what excuses we make, when we compare, as has been attempted in this book, New Testament teaching with what is practised in the church today, we realise how far we have departed from Scriptural principles. If the Bible is indeed the inspired Word of God, surely it should be the final criteria in all matters pertaining to life and godliness. Our attitude should be the same as that of the Bereans of old. They *“were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures everyday to see if what Paul said was true”* (Acts 17:11).

We conclude with the words of Bernard Ram: *“Finally, we all need a new sense of respect for Holy Scripture... Let us then steer a straight course through the Holy Bible... Every interpreter, from the professional philologist to the Sunday school teacher, can well take heart the following words of Barrows: Foremost among the qualities that belong to the interpreter is a **supreme regard for truth**...He will need a constant and vivid apprehension of the sacredness of all truth, more especially of scriptural truth, which God has revealed for the sanctification and salvation of men. ‘Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.’ God will not hold guiltless any who tamper with it in the interest of preconceived human opinions, thus substituting the folly of man for the wisdom of God.”*

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