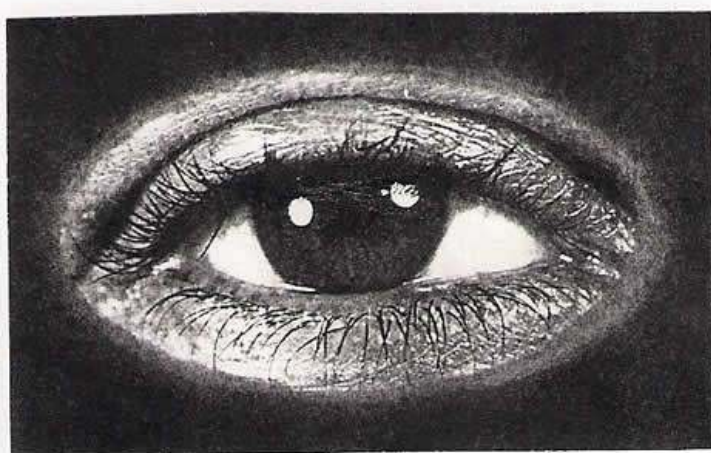


EYES WIDE OPEN



----- Ray Miller -----

***Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
was blind, but now I see***

***Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come
'tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home***

John Newton

This book is a follow on and a companion to the first book
.. and to the church in Auckland write ...
by the same Author

If you have not already read this other book, you are very much
encouraged to do so before reading this one

Blessings

ISBN 0-473-10293-5

foreword

“As a reasonably intelligent professional man, how come you stayed at that Church for so long – even for 25 years ?”

I looked hard at my eldest son who had asked the question with a rather incredulous expression on his face. It was a fair enough question, even a teaser, but how to attempt to summarise and quickly convey the many factors and reasons that I thought contributed to the answer. I answered as best I could at the time, but later as I thought more about it, the main reasons were simply 2 –

I had basically been naive ... and also spiritually blind

The question has stuck with me over the years as I have watched others wrestle with the quandary of attending what may have started out as vibrant local assemblies, but which then gave increasing qualms as they slowly and disconcertingly developed into the formal and monotonous attendance at another lifeless and Legalistic gathering, - not forgetting to mention the control and influence that reached into much of the private and personal lives that we had experienced.

Then there were the other comments after my first book on the subject – ***and to the church at Auckland write.***

“It didn’t go far enough” said one former attendee.

“What about Legalism, and tithing?” said another

“Are they a Cult?” asked yet another

Other reports came to my ears “there’s another local church group exactly the same in ... !!” “And there’s another Church group in ... even worse than the Roskill variety” said yet another !”

I pondered these comments and thought about the many and various sincere people that had passed through and left our particular local assembly, and the trauma and in some cases devastation that they had to endure after leaving or rather extracting themselves from its grip.

Recently, I have come in contact with former full-time ministers who have exited from the local structured religious scene, and enjoyed their writings and insights from their decades of experience. Then, what we now call 'open homes of grace' in a small group unfolded and brought much encouragement (and the occasional fright besides).

I watched as various former 'faithful' church attendees that we have stayed in contact with, got involved in the local community as they become true 'salt and light' - ejected out of the saltshaker and into the world, even as the Master intended !
The effect of some of these individuals has been quite remarkable to behold.

My own meditations in the word began to stir me anew, prison visitation and Bible-In-Schools, meetings with some Gideons all played their part in a re-emphasis of focus.

Writings and notes made over the years have led to this little booklet. the 'out of religion' experience and into a network of fellow believers as my eyes have progressively been opened from spiritual blindness to sight.

So this book is my experience of having blind eyes opened,

I once was blind but now I see
as John Newton wrote so many years ago

May this be your experience also

The seeing eye and the hearing ear are of the Lord Proverbs 20:2

With grace

Ray Miller

index

chapter	title	page no
1	conditioning	6
2	priorities	10
3	the corruption of simplicity	12
4	spiritual blindness	15
5	John 9	22
6	restoring sight, opening blind eyes	33
7	Law versus Grace	35
8	legalism	38
9	tithing	47
10	twice to the temple	51
11	the 2 strongholds	56
12	cults	58
13	the religious marketplace	69
14	strange fire	73
15	from history	76
16	the 2 trees	80
17	of strangers, pilgrims, sojourners	82
18	identity	87
19	our names	92
20	security	93
21	epilogue	97
22	transition	100

conditioning

1

The way to cook a live frog, (now who would want to do that I hear everyone say) and stop it jumping out of the pan the while, is to put the frog in cold water, place the pan on a hot fire, and raise the temperature ever so s l o w l y.

This illustration is of course to prove a point, not as the latest fad in cooking !

The principle is that we can suffer huge changes to our environment, if only they be introduced piecemeal and over some time - its called conditioning, and our topic for consideration.

Someone has observed quite rightly, that what is intolerable to one generation, when forcibly introduced, can become readily accepted by the next generation. This observation on consideration, can be readily proven, over the past decades here in New Zealand.

I clearly recall the first mention of mixed flatting in the 1960's and the offence it caused to older people – yet within 10 years it had become an accepted and common practice, and now few blink an eye when it gets mentioned,

Likewise many other formerly scandalous practices have become commonplace and accepted within a few years or decades :

women smoking in public,

women not wearing gloves in public (true - this was frowned on not so long ago),

getting into debt over your ears,

and more recently - homosexuality, gay (or Hero ?) parades,

lesbianism, now there are even gay parades, gay Churches, gay priests - absolutely unthinkable several decades ago. And even gay and trans-sexual Members of Parliament.

And the rapidity of such changes and the soon acceptance of formerly scandalous practices has increased as time rolls past - the tempo of change and our acceptance of it seems to quicken as the years pass

But to consider the Christian faith and religion.

The early Church, in its infancy, in the decades after Jesus death and resurrection

Persecution of believers - if you became a believer on Friday, there often was no job on Monday, or a believer could even face the Roman lions in the Coliseum.

Small groups of Christians met, wherever, whenever, however
Christians shared most everything - including property and possessions
There was an equality among believers, no titles, leaders were unassuming, and not very conspicuous at all
Elders - the older in age Christians - were the example and the guides

And then Constantine got religion and everything changed - Christianity became respectable

Religious conditioning really started from this time, and for 1,000 years the Church entered the dark ages.

A priestly class was formed with a Pope at the top of the pyramid
The Church was divided into clergy and laity - the professionals and the commoners

Paid professional clergy were hired

Cloisters were formed - the absolute antithesis of Jesus message.

Churches and Cathedrals were built

Titles were dished out and eagerly accepted by the Clergy

Religious robes and garments were introduced

Tithes were re-introduced

Incense and holy water were introduced, and other trappings of religious paraphernalia

Priests and Nuns were forbidden to marry (forgetting that Simon Peter had a wife)

Politics and religion were often merged, (to the detriment of each)

Heretics were killed, whereas Jesus never defended himself against his enemies, and even healed the ear of a soldier that Peter cut off (live by the sword = die by the sword)

Meetings became more performance orientated, as some ministers became showmen

Believers became listeners and hearers only, instead of participants

Organisation became substituted for a living organism

Seminars became all the rage, and more overseas speakers (at a hefty Fee of course)

Church rolls became common (someone said that you may as well have your name written on a sausage roll as on a Church roll)
Outsiders were encouraged to "come to Church" instead of taking the faith to them where they are - "Come hear" instead of "Go, tell"
Christians became more Church club orientated instead of being salt and light in the community - the Church became a Fortress enclosure and institution

But all of these were imposed slowly, over many years, decades, and centuries, and have become generally accepted by the masses as religious conditioning closed our eyes.

Then the Cults were birthed, principally in the USA in the 19th century, and have prospered.

And so today, ask anyone where the Church is and they will inevitably direct you to a building, instead of to the house of a believer.
We have become conditioned to meeting at a religious building once or twice a week,(or more if you are 'spiritual') instead of at your own house,
conditioned to hearing a sermon without involvement (or interruption) instead of small group sharing,
conditioned to giving tithes without checking just where they are going,
conditioned to following a religious meeting format with a time limit,
conditioned to standing, sitting, standing, sitting, etc when directed,
conditioned to looking at the back of someone else's head for long periods of time,
conditioned to worshipping on cue,
conditioned to all manner of religiosity,
conditioned by peoples opinion of us, and our dress etc,
conditioned just like the frog in the frying pan as he was slowly cooked to death.

We in the western culture and society have been conditioned by the slow introduction of religious 'leaven' into the pure Christianity that Jesus left behind him, and which now most people have accepted without question. And so we wonder at the sparcity of miracles, and the rarity of seeing God move as he does in non western culture countries.

And when we do pause to wonder at our powerlessness and lack of influence, we are conditioned to more programmes and more prayer meetings, instead of to repentance and simplicity of lifestyle - to how

many is John the Baptist a role model, and there never has been a greater one on earth according to Jesus rating of him.

Religious conditioning is undoubtedly the greatest bondage on the planet, and there are no pills able to be prescribed for it.

Only the Holy Spirit can bring sight to blind eyes, in his own way and time.

Dear Lord, forgive us, and help us swim against the religious conditioning tide.

Amongst members of the Body of Christ :

**UNITY
FREEDOM
CHARITY / LOVE**

**in Essential things
in NON – Essential things
in ALL Things**

priorities

2

Well it only took me some 45 years of living and some 25 years after being born-again, to give this some thought, to get it sorted out and make a few radical re-adjustments to my attitudes

If anybody had have asked me previous to this, just what my goals were, I would have answered something like - goals are what soccer players shoot for, as do basketballers, hockey players, etc

And then some comment made me stop and consider, just what were the correct priorities for a professed follower of the Lamb, a disciple of Jesus the Christ ? In what order did all that I was involved in fit together ?

What was the correct 'balance' to all the many and varied facets of life that I had to fit into each and every day ? I was a husband, father, grandfather, employer, neighbour, friend, business associate, consultant, counsellor, confidant, teacher, to my circle of relatives and associates, as well as having hobbies, sports interests, and needing times of healing, sustenance and relaxation.

So, about 2 months after starting to ponder the proper order of my various activities, I arrived at the following list of priorities

- | | | |
|----------|--|--|
| Firstly | God | He just has to come first
Our Creator and heavenly Father,
Our main aim must be to do His will |
| Secondly | My wife | My God given life-long partner
Her welfare was my paramount responsibility |
| Thirdly | My children | Until they reached adult hood |
| Fourthly | My career / occupation, | To provide materially for my family and I |
| Fifthly | My health, sport, hobbies, recreation times | To keep healthy and fresh |

Then **My local fellowship**
And Other People interspersed the while
 but never upsetting the order

Having got this order finally sorted out, I happened to turn on to Derek Prince on the radio, and heard him say “well most everyone knows the correct order of our priorities, which are ” and then he repeated my list almost word for word.

Where had I been for my adult life ? and likewise, most of the Christians that I had met.

Surely having wrong priorities is the simple reason that so many Christians have blatantly unbalanced lives and attitudes. The insidious fact is that Christians allow local Church activities, Church and religious programmes, and other supposed Church needs to get out of order or to creep up the list into second or even into the very first place - when what the minister says over-rides what the Holy Spirit is trying to say to us, when religious activity supersedes hearing and obeying the voice of the Shepherd.

“My sheep hear My voice, and they follow ME” says Jesus John 10:27

Anything, no matter how sweet or religiously attractive, that drowns His voice is counter productive to a balanced Christian life and also is quite obvious and off-putting to our work-mates, relatives and the world at large around us.

So, I have found and continually observed that right priorities aren't just important, they are **absolutely vital** for a spiritually balanced life well pleasing and useful to God, and which is then empowered to freely bless others around us. All our activities and energies with the Holy Spirit to personally lead us, not just as some well-meaning minister (but with his own private agenda) would have us to be and do.

If the foundation is level the building will be upright (just consider the Tower of Pisa)

H O L I N E S S = W H O L E N E S S

God's peace and Joy - that the world neither knows, nor can give, nor can take away

3

the corruption of simplicity

A surprising verse caught my eye recently

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ
2 Corinthians 11 : 3

I pondered this statement for a while

But I thought that only “natural” unregenerate people had what is referred to as “corrupt minds”

I thought that this phrase of having a corrupt mind only referred to the nature and minds of people before they had their minds renewed in Christ, before they were born again, - reborn spiritually.

Crudens concordance is very expansive on the use and the meaning of the word **corrupt** in scripture, it has a variety of meaning according to its situation and usage :

To consume	<i>Matthew 6 : 19</i>
To defile or pollute	<i>Exodus 32 : 7</i>
To mar or spoil	<i>1 Corinthians 15 : 33</i>
To pervert or lead astray	<i>2 Corinthians 11 : 3</i>
To break or make void	<i>Matthew 2 : 8</i>
Vicious or unsound	<i>1 Timothy 6 : 5 2 Timothy 3 : 8</i>

And the dictionary defines it morally depraved, wicked, dishonest, fraudulent.

But Paul is here speaking to supposed Christians – those who have been regenerated, renewed, born again etc

And he is warning Christians against anything that adds to
“the simplicity that is in Christ”

WOW, do you sense what I sense he is getting at ?? anything at all
that adds to simplicity in Christianity comes from a corrupt mind

That's pretty strong stuff indeed

Anything that adds to the simplicity that is in Christ comes from a corrupt mind

So, consider him who never had a bed to call his own
who although a carpenter, never built a Church building,
who only had a following of 12, didn't establish a static crowd of
supporters as such
had a mobile ministry, travelling continually, not stopping in the one
place for long
continually visited people in their own homes, met them where they were
otherwise spoke in the open to whoever would listen
was dependent on those who listened to him for sustenance, but never
took a salary
even wore a simple one piece garment from accounts.
and was at odds with the religious establishment of his day – rebuking
and chastising them
simply moving around healing, blessing, ministering to whatever /
whoever's needs
without racial bias, ministering to all the needy from whatever culture

Simple stuff indeed – not for Him earthly buildings, church rolls,
collections, salaries, pledges, earthly honour or titles, ecclesiastical
garb, or religious trappings

Anything that adds to the simplicity that is in Christ comes from a corrupt mind

Anything added at all, anything no matter how noble the motive

There's an axiom well used in the Business world K.I.S.S.
Keep it simple stupid

And that is just what Paul is advocating

And he copied Jesus example likewise – he also was mobile, earning his own keep, meeting in peoples homes, never erecting a Church building or starting a tent franchise venture !!

Simplicity indeed,

for Christianity to be simple following Jesus alone Wow
With anything added at all coming from a “corrupt mind”

Staggeringly simple and simply staggering

Thanks Paul for reminding us yet again of how to simply follow the Master

HIS WORK to be done HIS WAY or not at all !

spiritual blindness

4

the condition ...

God's commission to Isaiah was - ***“Go and tell this people You hear indeed but understand not, and you see indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert (change) and be healed”*** *Isaiah 5 : 9, 10*

Spiritual blindness is here linked to spiritual deafness and lethargic hearts

Jesus repeated this passage to the multitude virtually word for word in *Matthew 13: 14, 15*

Paul also repeated it to the Jews as he turned from them to minister henceforth to the Gentiles (non Jews) Both Jesus and Paul repeated it as Isaiah first uttered it, except for one vital word – they both changed one vital phrase from ***shut their eyes*** to ***their eyes have they closed*** - they both accused their respective audience of willfully making themselves blind by personally closing their eyes to the truth as it was presented to them

10,000 multiplied by Nought = Nought, nothing ... absolutely not.a.thing

10,000 blind people can see no further than one blind person

Spiritual blindness, as it was in Isaiah and Jesus day, and so on down throughout the ages to this very day, continues to be the most common ailment throughout the religious world system

Before the word Prophet was used, such people were simply called seers or see - ers - those who could see *1 Samuel 9 : 9* referring to those few people who could see and discern spiritual truths, who could see the true spiritual state of people and society and the nations, who could perceive the people around about them as God himself saw them

The plain fact is that

One person with sight can see further than 10,000 blind people

Natural blindness comes through either a congenital defect from birth or as the result of some occurrence, perhaps an accident .

So with spiritual blindness - which likewise comes similarly from the same one of two ways :

The first way is congenital, from birth - the fallen Adamic nature that we are all born with, and our inborn inclination to sin that gives a blindness to spiritual things.

(This needs an awakening by God's Holy Spirit to give sight - called a 're-birth' or being 'born again' The things of the Spirit of God are foolishness without such an awakening - just consider Nicodemus, and Jesus words to him in *John 3*)

The second way is by 'religiosity' experienced by 'naturally' minded people who try to understand the things of God by education or by the application of tradition all without a personal encounter with the living God

Someone has said that

educating a devil doesn't make a saint – just an educated devil

(who is actually then a bigger danger than before receiving the education)

Religious spiritual blindness seems to come in 2 types :

-- those who **CAN NOT** see

and those who **WILL NOT** see

Some of this later group may actually once have had sight, they may have been re-born but at some stage they have chosen not to continue in it - some personal crisis or decision or trauma has occurred and 'light' has been rebuffed through self-will or by a deliberate refusal, or even by overlaying tradition and natural education as with the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Paul spoke of these people in *Acts 28 : 25 – 27* just as Isaiah had done as they each observed the same effect.

In Jesus day, as the Pharisees listened to Jesus, few if indeed any of them realised just who he was (and even His own disciples had trouble with that one), and then in their blindness they resisted him to the point of murder. Nicodemus is recorded as one of the very few Pharisees to

have the inward hunger and courage to seek Him out, but even then secretly 'by night'

The religious fraternity, the Masters of the Mosaic Law in their spiritual blindness, were Jesus' greatest detractors and persecutors and the object of his harshest words and judgement as in *Matthew 23*

He continually refers to them **as “you blind guides, you fools and blind”**, verses 16 – 26 **and “Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch”** *Matthew 15 : 14:*

For judgement I am come into this world, that they which seen not might see, and that they who (think that they) see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him, heard these words, and said unto Him, “Are we blind also ?” Jesus said unto them, If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now you say “We see”, therefore your sin remains *John 9 : 39 – 41* (more later)

They eventually 'got him' and had him executed, (but in God's foreknowledge and purpose) as they had done to the countless numbers of prophets and men of God who had preceded Jesus, and still do from that time to this.

Later on there was Stephen and the rage and murder that he encountered from the same Pharisees in *Acts 7*

In *Acts 13 : 50* ***devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city*** opposed the ministry of Paul and his companions - these otherwise commendable people thought that they were doing right, but were in reality spiritually blind. How incredible that even otherwise devout and honourable women and civic leaders can be so deceived and blinded, even to the point of opposing the things of God (you could refer to Simon Peter about this fact also, and how he tried to talk Jesus out of his God appointed mission to this planet in *Matthew 16 : 22*)

John, in his message to the 7 Churches, is particularly descriptive of the apostate state of the last church, that of Laodicea, (and which many believe continues to the end of the age and Jesus second coming) ***because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. I will spue you out of my mouth, because you say, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that you are***

wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked

Revelation 3 : 16, 17

Here again is this condition of spiritual blindness within the local church scene

By some circumstance / accident or deliberate act, light has been rejected and spiritual blindness has resulted.

And so on down through the ages until current times - spiritual blindness is still evident and even chosen particularly by those within the religious world who look to natural education and tradition instead of to the Holy Spirit as the sole dispenser of living water, living words and the opener of blind eyes.

the cure ...

It is fascinating to read how Jesus treated each type of blindness...

The naturally blind He touched and healed as in *John 9* and many other instances, the restoration of sight seems to have been one of the most common miracles that he performed

(I often wondered why John spent one precious entire chapter - *John 9* on one such blind man's experience - and then I realised that it was to expose the Pharisees and the other type of deliberate self-imposed blindness and the methods that their descendants still utilise today, but more of this particular instance later)

But it is so interesting to read how Jesus brought sight to naturally blind people

Two blind men followed him (Jesus), crying and saying "Son of David, have mercy on us" And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this ? They replied to him, "Yes Lord" Then he touched their eyes, saying "According to your faith be it unto you" And their eyes were opened Matthew 9 : 27 – 30

Two blind men healed at the same time – remarkable, (and only recorded by Matthew)

He touched their eyes, with his hands and fingers

But the most remarkable account and process is recorded by Mark

And they brought a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up and said, I see men as trees walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. Mark 8 : 22 - 25

The KJ version indicates that he actually spat on the mans eyes, which was directly against Pharasaical rules and custom. Perhaps he moistened his fingers with his spit and then touched the mans eyes with it. But this method of using his spit to anoint and touch a person was not exceptional at all. Just prior to this occasion, in *Mark 7 : 32* Jesus had healed a deaf and dumb man by putting ***his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him Ephphatha, that is “be opened”, and immediately, his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plain***

He later repeated the same action of using his spit to anoint the blind man at Bethsaida in *Mark 8*

To my total amazement, my own personal experience followed this very Mark 8 method, but spiritually of course :

Firstly to be taken personally as it were, by the hand, and led, “out of the town” - out of a legalistic controlling assembly, to have a degree of spiritual sight given to my blind eyes, and to see other Christian leaders “as trees walking” - to be in awe of mature men of God as established planting’s of the Lord

Then, years later, his hands again placed on my eyes, his anointing on this very passage, after “looking up” and waiting on God, to have my individuality and person-hood restored, and then insights to “see every man clearly” and allowed to see other spiritual insights as clear as crystal WOW

And so by personal experience and observation, this 2 stage method that Jesus used then, is still used by the Spirit of God today

I recall an instance of a woman friend of ours. S was 'born into' the particular same Church that we attended. Her parents started attending the Church before she was born, and she knew nothing else than life at this Church, and indeed had never been to another. When we were considering leaving that Church, our thought was that there was no way that S would ever do so – if ever anyone was born and bred and wedded to a particular Church it was her. But just shortly before we exited, my wife spoke to S on the phone - "Jan" she said "I've seen it" And so she had. It was a sudden insight that she got in a moment of time – the inward working of the Holy Spirit, who divinely revealed the spiritual condition of that church to her. And she was off - her husband and S actually leaving before us. Independently, individually, in sovereignty, it's amazing how the Spirit of God works.

The antidote to spiritual blindness, for there appears to be only the one - is that only God's Holy Spirit can give sight to spiritually blind people - only his direct illumination or his anointing on the spoken or written word can open blind eyes.

To the church at Laodicea in their spiritual state of wretchedness, misery, poverty, blindness and nakedness, Jesus urged them ***I counsel you to buy of meand anoint your eyes with eyesalve, that you may see***

What is this eyesalve he encouraged them to apply ?

It was his own spit that he used repeatedly to anoint blind eyes, to awaken deaf ears, and to make the dumb to speak – holy spit, applied by the Master himself, quickened by the Spirit of the Living God who works sovereignly

I believe eyesalve must be the earnest seeking of the Holy Spirit and His anointing and the illumination that He alone brings through the written and living word, and taking heed to those around us who can see - the see -ers of our day, those with true spiritual discernment.

A searchlight shining into a blind person's face and eyes has absolutely NO effect whatsoever – no matter how strong the candle-power or the efforts of the applicator - no amount of external light can bring sight to a blind person.

And likewise, no amount of natural preaching, admonishing, rebuking, education, nor any amount of well meaning efforts can open dead blind eyes.

**"What light" the blind man will say to the torch held to his face
"I see nothing" because he is blind, his eyes are sightless !!**

Only the inward working of the Holy Spirit whose words and anointing are always “spirit and life” can produce spiritual sight – and He alone.

It is beyond any natural cure

Saul on the Damascus Road had such an experience, had his natural eyes firstly blinded, then opened, and his life forever changed and empowered

And from that experience Paul’s mission was to go to the Gentiles
to open their eyes and turn then from darkness to light Acts 26 : 18

As in the primal creation ***darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the surface of the waters, and God said “let there be light”, and there was light and God divided the light from darkness*** *Genesis 1 : 2 - 4*

The seeing eye and the hearing ear are of the Lord *Proverbs 20 : 12*

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind *Psalms 146 : 8*

Holy Spirit, please continue your work of opening blind eyes, and bringing sight to the blind, and helping us to apply the eyesalve, in this day and age

Amen & Amen

The sole function of all Christian ministry is to get people to see ... for themselves

Many would sooner deny the sickness than take the medicine

John 9

5

Recently, during a family reading, by 'chance', my eyes caught a verse in this Chapter, and as I read on, it was as though a series of spotlights were turned on. Verse after verse opened up in a new light. Since then I have repeatedly returned to this amazing Chapter and each time still further insight has come - even as I write now

Previous to this, I had occasionally read this Chapter as yet another of Jesus' miracles, but never, never with the depth of meaning recently revealed. It has become to me, one of the most 'enlightening' Chapters of the entire Bible.

Why is it tucked away in the middle of the most 'spiritual' Gospel, between the great discourse on the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the raising of Lazarus, then the most detailed account of Jesus' death and resurrection ?

Why virtually 'waste' an entire Chapter on one minor miracle ?
Why bother to include the full detailed account of the circumstances surrounding the recovery of sight to one of the many blind folk that Jesus healed ? Why ? WHY ?
Surely John had more important aspects of Jesus life to relate and record !!

For a person who had spent a quarter of a century under a holiness / legalistic ministry in a Church where authoritarian control was subtly yet absolutely practised - this Chapter was to become a revelation of the manner and methods of Pharisees in an amazing fashion. It seemed as if this Chapter was written just for me and my circumstances - to 'discover' it at the precise time in my life when my family and I were in the difficult process of extracting ourselves from the tentacles of that Church and our involvement there.
It seemed as if the Lord had this Chapter written 2,000 years in advance just for us !!

Every aspect of this Chapter seemed to relate to our experiences with the hierarchy of that particular Church - as if God was saying that there was a deep spiritual problem long rooted in mankind and organised structured religion - how a so called 'Holiness Ministry' can drift into rigid formalism and legalism and eventually into

S P I R I T U A L B L I N D N E S S !!

The whole message of this Chapter seemed to be just that --

Spiritual Blindness can become Total Deception

The blind man had the identical experience that we were having - exactly!

The spirit of the Pharisees has continued the same down through the ages !! WOW !!

Before reading this Study, could I strongly suggest that you read the entire Chapter through prayerfully - please. This will give an overall appreciation of the whole story BEFORE reading these notes.

And, maybe you will see still more aspects revealed in this amazing Chapter

Bless You Heaps

St John's Gospel Chapter 9

And as Jesus passed by ...

Jesus has the first say in this Chapter and also the last in verse 41
As in Revelation 1 : 8 Jesus is the First and the Last, He was before
our birth and will have the last word at the end of the earthly
experiences of us and others around us.

... he saw a man which was blind from his birth

This man was 'blind from birth' So I believe, those of us who were born
again at cultish style Churches.

Truly Born spiritually - Yes Of the Spirit of God - Yes
because God honours His Word, wherever, however it is preached
1 Thessalonians 2 : 13

but, never-the-less, like kittens, born with our eyes closed and blind to
the true spiritual state of that Church and religiosity, indeed "born blind"
In our first love, we were oblivious to the true state of that Church, while
we grew spiritually and served God and developed as Christians.

***Jesus answered ... I am the light of the world he spat on the
ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the
blind man with the clay***

Then, one day, Jesus passed by us, on our Christian walk and
'anointed our eyes'.

He opened our eyes to the controlling spirit operating in that Church.
Now, this comes to us in different ways, by different means and
circumstances - but to the honest, sincere follower of Him (to the
beggars of verse 8) eventually it comes, and our eyes are opened - we
become aware of deficiencies in methods, lack of love, lack of true
spiritual counsel for our deep innermost and personal needs, and the
subtle control that reaches into our personal liberty and on occasions
even invades our consciences.

So, Jesus by His Holy Spirit, brings insight to the 'blind'

***And Jesus said unto him, Go wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is
by interpretation, Sent)***

Water in the Scripture is a type of the Word of God.
We search the Bible and compare Scripture with man's methods as operating in that Church, and the strict holding to the tradition of the Founder even over the clear Word of God.

He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing

And as we seek God in His Word, we are "washed" - cleansed / forgiven 'and came seeing' Our eyes are truly opened to the spiritual state of that Church before God and its deficiencies.

The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind said, Is not this he that sat and begged ?

'The Neighbours' - our close friends, become aware of this insight and our dissatisfaction of the methods and control, and report it back to the Church hierarchy.

.. sat and begged

Indeed, how many precious, talented, hungry, earnest, sincere folk faithfully and dutifully attending the Church services merely sit and sit and beg and beg - year after year - sitting and begging.
Begging to be used by God, begging to know His will for their lives, begging for a deeper experience, begging for satisfying spiritual food instead of the constant diet of rebuking and the regurgitation of peoples mistakes, begging for the spiritual gifts to operate.
But all they do is to SIT - albeit on upholstered seats and luxurious decor and tremendous facilities, but none the less begging all the while.

When this enlightenment and dissatisfaction comes, then friends talk and gossip spreads and eventually the oversight hear about it and start asking the questions :

HOW were your eyes opened ? WHERE have you been going to ?
HAVE you attended other Churches ? WHAT other minister have you been talking to ?

Accusations start flying around - "sneaking off to other Churches and services" (as if that was a Crime !) When all the time it is Jesus and the Holy Spirit who as been showing us. But the Oversight will never believe that, instead they keep asking "HOW were your eyes opened ?"

He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight

‘Jesus made clay’ ... common clay. Common circumstances in our personal experiences to ‘anoint our eyes to wash and receive sight’ Amazing, all we have done is ‘went and washed’ in obedience to Jesus voice - we have simply obeyed Him !

My sheep hear My voice ... and they follow Me Jesus said *John 10:27*

They brought to the Pharisees, him that aforetime time was blind

Most of us know the tap on the shoulder, the summons, and the long talks with the Oversight (their version being "the hours we have spent with them")

Again the HOW question ... WHERE have you been sneaking of to ? WHO have you been talking to ? etc etc endlessly

Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keeps not the Sabbath day. Others said, How can such a man that is a sinner do such miracles ? And there was a division among them

‘There was a division among them’ The split starts right here - the Oversight's refusal to believe our insights into the established pattern of control and interference. The division widens, and there are only 2 alternatives - acknowledge that we have been wrong (for having had our eyes opened), and repent, submit to the Oversight against our conscience and be emasculated forever, another dutiful, broken, crushed dependent to keep sitting in the pews or LEAVE !!

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight

The Jews (Pharisees) did not believe him, and called his parents

The Oversight now start asking family and friends Where have we been going ? Who have we been speaking to ? Our spiritual parents and friends now get the full third degree questioning.

These words spoke his parents, because they feared the Jews : for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue

His parents dodge the questions because "they feared the Jews " Right here is the great underlying reason that keeps so many attending legalistic authoritarian Churches ...

FEAR, shuddering, carnal F E A R

As Catholics fear their 'mother Church' and its leaders, so, FEAR is instilled through 'holiness ministries' (There are only 2 motivating and holding emotions FEAR or LOVE)

FEAR of going to Hell if anyone leaves 'The Work'

"When You received the Lord - You became HIS, but You found Him here - so you become OURS also "

"If you leave off following Him here - you will lose your Salvation" is the insinuation, and the spoken word. "And if you leave off attending here - you are really leaving Him whom you found here, and likewise you will lose your Salvation" when you leave here !

Heavy stuff, but constantly insinuated, and then actually conveyed and spoken !

So, FEAR becomes the prime motive for staying on
Fear of losing your Salvation - which is unscriptural in fact, but so
Awesome in its holding Power !

What leave the 'Work' and go to Hell ... WOW

FEAR of losing friends, dear friends of many years standing, knowing that many will cut you off completely when you leave, snub you in public etc, etc

FEAR of losing family, especially when this is accentuated by the exceptional intermarriage amongst members - the intertwined family connections are a massive deterrent to those considering leaving.
But how to handle this not so subtle pressure ??

But as someone said ... "I left a Church of Christ to join the Body of Christ"

Then again they called the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise : we know that this man is a sinner

Again the summons, again the questions, WHAT ? HOW ? and our mistakes and 'character flaws' are reiterated

Then they reviled him, and said, You are his disciple, but we are Moses disciples

Failing at the third degree question routine, they shift to another tactic ridicule

How true we have found this : Stories put round without an element of truth in them, with no effort made to substantiate them or check their validity. Ministry from the pulpit itself using such stories as fact, when in reality they are absolute lies - this makes their ministry one of libel and slander, lie spreading. Defaming people's character with no chance to defend or counter it.

The mistakes of people dug up and passed on. Confidences from years previous passed on as a reason for folk leaving, their privileged knowledge of people's history discussed with associates, causing alienation.

"You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples" "You are leaving to join some unknown, but WE are following the pattern and methods of the Founder." Again and again we have heard this statement ... "WE WILL NOT CHANGE " from the established methods of control, inordinate discipline, a 'holiness ministry' that produces condemnation and inferiority, interference in family and personal lives, friendships, courtships and marriages, business relationships, employment etc etc, far beyond any minister's scope.

Instead they follow the Founder's methods and control principles, instead of adjusting to the Word of God and keeping up to date in methods of presenting the Gospel.

As I heard recently : "If there isn't change at the top there will be revolution from the bottom "

And so people vote with the only means possible to them, - with their Feet, as the exodus continues.

I would humbly suggest that, instead of 'the Work' being cleansed of 'dross' and 'dirt' as has been publicly stated on multiple occasions, that it is the 'cream' who have left - generally mature, experienced, spiritually minded people, and the most loyal, faithful supporters in years past. And they leave after decades of total support and toil, having helped to build it - now to sadly observe the decimation and division of the flock. But God is the judge of the Shepherds *Ezekiel 34*

We know that God spoke to Moses

They believe that God had led the Founder in ALL things, that his methods were virtually infallible (just as the Roman Catholics view the Pope and his decrees) They will maintain them, even if by so-doing the Church empties.

as for this fellow, we do not know from where he is.

As for this other Church you are thinking of going to - who are they ? they don't have our 'specialness' Other ministries are bluntly derided ! In the Oversight's eyes and actions their Church is unique and to be kept separate from any real contact with other Churches in the Body of Christ. (A tourniquet around a finger will cause it to eventually wither up and drop off !)

The man is astounded that the Pharisees refuse to acknowledge Jesus and His work of restoring sight. So we are astounded at their rejection of any current move of the Spirit outside their own little circle. (In word they may acknowledge them occasionally, but otherwise they warn against them and are always looking for examples to be used against them - only they are right. This attitude of 'specialness' becomes a hallmark of their ministry !)

The man answered if this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

The man dares to speak out using sense and logic. God is obviously active in other Churches as countless have experienced (with spiritual gifts operating besides) While the authoritarian Church becomes a

stagnant backwater clinging desperately to a dead man's foundation - what a bondage Church tradition can become.

They answered and said unto him, You were altogether born in sins, and do you teach us? And they cast him out.

Right here is shown and revealed the strongest mark of a Pharisee - deep spiritual PRIDE

They will not receive comment or criticism or instruction from anyone occupying a pew !

"Who are YOU to teach us - We are 'the Chosen Frozen'

"We are God's mouthpiece to you not from you to us "

"Who do you think you are getting revelation and insight direct from God that shows us up ?"

They pride themselves on knowing all the answers on each and every spiritual topic. And likewise they cast out our comments as heresy - they cannot possibly be wrong, any suggestion that they need correction is rejected. Of all those who have tried to offer helpful hints or make comments / suggestions, I know of no one who has been received graciously or has had suggestions implemented.

To repeat - the deepest mark of a Pharisee is their refusal to accept comment or criticism from anyone.

Pride brings SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS !!

The Bible is quite clear about receiving instruction, which no-one is to be beyond receiving, and that constantly throughout ones entire lifetime !

Better a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king who will no more be admonished

Ecclesiastics 4 : 13

Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness. Let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil

Psalms 141 : 5

Reproofs of instruction are the way of Life

Proverbs 6 : 23

The way of Life is to keep instruction, he that refuses reproof errs

Proverbs 10 : 17

Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuses instruction, but he that regards reproof shall be honoured

Proverbs 13 ; 18

Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend *Proverbs 27 : 5*

The rod and reproof give wisdom *Proverbs 29 : 15*

God even used an ass to speak to Balaam *Numbers 22 : 28*

And they cast him out

So many folk I know have been asked to leave because of their 'lack of support of the work' or otherwise turned into virtual 'LEPERS' by either no communication by phone or personal contact, spreading the word to friends to avoid certain 'marked' people, betrayal of confidences to associates, and the relating of people's mistakes to others in ministry or personally.

This 'Freezing out' method of ostracising is a form of 'internal excommunication' well used by the Exclusive Brethren and the Cults.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when he had found him, he said unto him, Do you believe on the Son of God ?

And so he does with us so 'cast out', the 'Outcasts' - He comes to us and opens His word remarkably.

And he said Lord I believe. And he worshipped Him (Jesus)

Everyone that I have spoken to who has left an authoritarian Church says that their personal worship and intimacy with the Lord has increased out of sight as they have enjoyed fellowship with people in the Greater Body of Christ.

In my own case, I learned more about worship in the first 3 months since leaving than in the previous 15 years, and experience living communion as distinct from formality, legalism and generally controlled services. (I well recall that on the few occasions in the previous Church, when liberty was encouraged, most folk were so bound that they could not take advantage of it - the years of conditioning and control had restricted and prevented the liberty, release and spontaneity so vital in worship)

And Jesus said ...

As mentioned at the beginning, Jesus has the first and the last say - so with the Church we have just left - Jesus will have the last word, not the Oversight there

Jesus said, for judgement am I come into this world, that they which see not might see; and THEY WHICH (think they) SEE MIGHT BE MADE B L I N D "

And some of the Pharisees which were with him, heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also ?

Jesus said unto them, If you (knew that you) were blind, you would have no sin : but now you say, We see, therefore your sin remains.

Praise God for Spiritual Sight, insight, and His opening of blind eyes

And for the record of this fantastic Chapter !

Thank you Lord,

Thank you.

restoring sight, opening blind eyes

6

It is remarkable how many references and instances there are within the Bible pages about blindness and the restoration of sight to the blind, and the opening of blind eyes

God spoke to Isaiah some 700 years before Jesus appeared
I the Lord have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, and will keep you,..... for a light to the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house Isaiah 42 : 6, 7

And again Isaiah prophesied ***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound*** Isaiah 61 : 1

Jesus repeated this in the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry, but He substituted a few words (in brackets)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He (the Lord) has anointed me to preach the gospel (good tidings) to the poor (meek); he has sent me to heal (bind up) the broken hearted; to preach (proclaim) deliverance (liberty) to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised (opening of the prison to them that are bound Luke 4 : 18)

He inserts this additional phrase - ***the recovering of sight to the blind***

Jesus said to Paul on the road to Damascus ***But rise, and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things that you have seen and the things in the which I will appear to you to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive***

forgiveness of sins among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me
Acts 26 : 16, 18

I believe that for me this *opening of the blind eyes, the bringing of liberty to the captive, the opening of the prison to those that were bound*, happened to me twice ...

The first time at age 21 when I had a real and personal “born-again” experience that changed the course of my life from that point – awakened me to the spiritual dimension, and freed me from sin and some life dominating habits.

And again some 25 years later after experiencing the coldness and confinement of an increasingly legalistic and authoritarian assembly – my eyes were again opened for a second time.

But this time, to what some refer to as the PRS – the Present Religious System, and the seducing spirit that pervades it

Accompanying this insight came *the bringing of liberty to the captive, the opening of the prison to those that were bound*, in yet another sense, as I extracted myself and my family painfully and traumatically from the same assembly where I had the earlier experience

Thank you Lord for your sovereign work of applying eyesalve to blind eyes

Someone long ago rightly observed ,

There are none so blind, as those who WILL NOT see

Law versus Grace

7

Probably the greatest pitfall for Christians in daily living is not being able to clearly distinguish the difference between Law and Grace.

The daily burden that many earnest Christians carry and the inward pressure and stress that results as we believe for God's grace but try and please God by keeping the Law is actual and real, and can lead to many personality, relationship and even health problems – ask most any Christian psychologist or social worker

For the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ

John 1 : 17

LAW and GRACE cannot be intermingled - or
Grace is no more Grace

Romans 11 : 6

They are absolutely and diametrically opposed

Whosoever of you are justified by the Law, you are fallen from Grace

Galatians 5 : 4

LAW and GRACE are absolutely contrary to each other – they are actually sworn enemies - they cannot share the same space, they have nothing in common, they are 2 totally different methods of dealing with moral issues and people

The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ ... after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster

Galatians 3 : 23, 24

The Law dispensation - the Old Covenant, was by Moses - and self effort.

The New Covenant of GRACE came by the sacrificial death of Jesus on Calvary, with justification by Faith alone, plus nothing.

Jesus fulfilled the entire LAW on Calvary, and God confirmed it by rending the veil of the temple in two, from top to bottom -- the way into

the Holy of Holies of the Temple was now open, the Law had been absolutely fulfilled, finished, and completed.

GRACE absolutely and totally supersedes and supplants the Law and its ordinances as introduced by Moses. Grace is a new dispensation and method of God's dealing with individuals and all humanity, especially the Gentiles

Grace commenced with Jesus death, and continues until Jesus second coming and return in glory.

There is nothing – not a thing, not one solitary thing, that we can do to earn an atom of God's favour by our works or our self effort – and this realisation is vital to our functioning and pleasing God, and a successful Christian walk

For by Grace are we saved through faith – it is the gift of God -, not of works, lest any should boast *Ephesians 2 : 8, 9*

No amount of charity giving, good works, making sacrifices of money, time or energy, can bring God's favour – these good acts are the result of having received God's favour – not the means by which they are earned

But there is another monumental allied understanding that will liberate many a sincere God seeking Christian, and this is the fact that :

The Law was given to the children of Israel – not to the Gentiles

Gentiles are any one who is not in a direct lineage descendant of the 12 tribes of Israel – the Mosaic Law was solely for the children of Israel and their direct descendants. All the other people on earth are therefore Gentiles in God's eyes, and as such are not within the compass of the Law, and as such never had to (and do not need to ever) keep the Law in any regard.

This is the fundamental reason why in Acts 15 many questions were raised in the early Church and on which the Apostles had to decree – basically did Gentiles have to keep the Law given by Moses to the children of Israel ?

Certain “legalisers” tried to impose Mosaic law on the Gentiles

Acts 15 : 1

Which caused no end of dissension and disputation *Acts 15 : 2*
So a Council meeting was held to debate and decide the issue
James as spokesman gave the answer - *Acts 15 : 13 – 29*

So here is my decision. We are not going to unnecessarily burden non Jewish people who turn to the Master. We will write them a letter and tell them: be careful not to get involved in activities connected with idols: to guard the morality of sex and marriage: to not serve food offensive to Jewish Christians – blood for instance Everyone agreed : apostles, leaders, all the people
Acts 15 : 18 – 22 TM

So, the Law was given by Moses to the children of Israel and no one else

The function of the Law is to bring an awareness of sin (as a mirror) and look forward to Jesus sacrifice and atonement for sin

I had not known sin, but by the Law *Romans 7 : 7*

So, leave the Law where it was – for the Israelites until Jesus death and resurrection

And walk free, under Grace and guided by the Spirit of the Living God
.... Alone

The LAW says DO Jesus says IT'S DONE

LAW is for the lawless GRACE is for the Penitent
Mix these up and the result is confusion

legalism

8

Notwithstanding the terrible advance of Aids worldwide, Cancer has been probably the most universally feared disease of the 20th and now the 21st century. It seems only able to be treated if caught at an early stage - if left unnoticed until well advanced it invariably announces a premature death.

It is a major cause of death, and a cure for it has been probably the most keenly researched target on this planet - what a prize awaits the discoverer of a cure or antidote.

But there is a Spiritual Cancer with the same result as physical Cancer if undetected at an early stage and remedied, called by many LEGALISM

As with physical Cancer, Legalism likewise is a major cause of Spiritual death, and has been the blight and curse of many a revival, spiritual awakening, or other move of God by whatever name.

And it continues to invade and control many an established "Church" assembly of whatever size and name - from the largest denominations and the biggest assemblies down to even small local Home Groups, it invades, attacks, and kills until the unmistakable odour of a rotting smelling carcase is all that remains

And even the Pentecostal movement and local assemblies have fallen to its effects in various instances, as well as the longer established traditional denominations.

It has progressively invaded many of New Zealand's assemblies, largely undetected, (someone observed "from North-Cape to the Bluff"), and reportedly New Zealand is not alone in this regard. The western 'religious world' has absorbed it to a great degree. And, those cultures where individualism is not encouraged, where the 'group' ethos instead is praised and fostered (as in Asian nations), where 'class' structure is still evident (as in Pacific Islands countries), such are ready made harbourers of its deadly influence.

So, what exactly is LEGALISM ?

How can it be identified, and prevented ?

Many individual discerning Christians and authors have identified its work, and warned of its influence. (e.g. *Legality* in Pilgrims Progress by John Bunyan)

(Indeed a lot of mankind's other mistakes have also now been swept by many under the 'umbrella' of the one fearsome word **LEGALISM**)

Salvation comes by the Faith in the finished work of Jesus sacrifice, the shedding of his blood, and his resurrection, and is obtained by repentance and FAITH and being spiritually Born-Again (born from above). This experience is wholly and solely worked by the Holy Spirit in an individuals life, irrespective of the occasion and whatever circumstances led to it happening, be it inside a church building, an invitation by an Evangelist, or in a one-on-one conversation, etc

After having been Born Again, works and good deeds should then follow from the heart of the believer, **but only as led by the Spirit of God** who then resides within each and every believer.

BUT, and here's the but after conversion. the new convert is often encouraged by other well -meaning Christians around them to ... "attend all the meetings" and "support all the Church activities and programmes" to the hilt - to study, read, attend, pray, etc all in an effort to obtain Gods further favour and 'grow to perfection ' in the Christian life. The emphasis is that their efforts will increase God's favour and can be earned.

When all the time that new convert actually has divine life within them - all they need is to further seek God for themselves, to learn to hear the voice of the Shepherd for themselves, to obey as God leads, to witness from their heart if and when God gives opportunity, and to find their particular gifting and sphere of service as they follow the Master day by day.

Sure, to pray, to meditate, to memorise Scripture, to seek God, to study or whatever, but only for personal enrichment. NOT to obtain Gods further favour, to slip into the trap of **EARNING** God's favour. The gift of Salvation is absolutely complete and cannot be added to by any deed or sacrifice, no matter how noble.

Do your Good Works, sure, but **NEVER** depend on them

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith ? Are you so foolish ? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh (natural works) ? Galatians 3 : 1 - 3

And that simply is the kernel of the spiritual Cancer of LEGALISM - starting in **faith**, but ending up depending on **works** for blessing. Good works surely follow salvation, **but in themselves good works and good deeds do not add anything to Calvary's finished work**, whatever any person on this globe may say.

Works must come from a loving heart, they must be inspired by the Spirit of God alone, and are the subject of a separate reward at Judgement day

The Gospel of WORKS seeks to replace the Gospel of GRACE

Good works have in themselves a hidden danger - they can lead a well-meaning person back into the keeping of the LAW and the 10 Commandments and dependency on them for blessing and eventually even for Salvation itself.

But to keep many an assembly ticking over and the attendances up, (and the offerings) the emphasis gets placed on our good works as pleasing to God and somehow adding to our Salvation

And such is Legalism - the deadly Cancer of 'good works' - righteousness by self effort, not by Faith alone. If and when our Christian efforts come from a misplaced motive - to build 'the points tally', to please God by our attendance or religious efforts, when we slip into pleasing some person or Minister instead of letting God's Spirit lead us into our individual sphere for service to the Master, we have drifted into Legalism, and its deadly effect soon follows.

And those who promulgate it - whose words are NOT spirit and life as Jesus words were, but which are only spoken religiously to increase the members efforts, to add to a congregations size or revenue - these eventually bring legality and death to a congregation and themselves. And the world outside can surprisingly quickly detect the smell and stench of a dead carcass, and the rotting flesh of Legalism and self-effort religious activity.

LEGALISM can indeed also come from moral and physical laziness (our 'spiritual garden' within should be kept free of weeds)

The simple fact is that it is personally far easier to follow a set of rules, or a programme, or what the chap in the pulpit says to do, than to have to obey your own conscience, to seek God for yourself, to heed His personal voice, to discipline your mind, to pray and get your own guidance direct from God. It is always easier to follow someone else's customs or traditions, forms and ceremonies - the only trouble is that they do not satisfy our spiritual thirst created and quenched solely by the Spirit of God within.

And so, Christians and whole assemblies can drift backwards into pleasing God by 'keeping the Law', by keeping a set of traditions and religious rules (and keeping an assembly ticking over for a while longer)

Self effort to achieve the tangible is unfortunately often preferred to a life of faith and trust

LAW and GRACE are actually and absolutely contrary to each other

The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ ... after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster

Galatians 3 : 23, 24

The Law dispensation - the Old Covenant, was by Moses - and self effort

The New Covenant of GRACE came by the sacrificial death of Jesus on Calvary, with justification by Faith alone, plus nothing.

For the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ

John 1 : 17

LAW and GRACE cannot be intermingled - or **Grace is no more Grace**

Romans 11 : 6

Imagine a spoonful of ink being dropped into a glass of pure fresh water - would you drink that polluted glassful of mixture, no matter how thirsty you may be ?

A little leaven leavens the whole lump

Galatians 5 : 9

Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the Law, you are fallen from grace

Galatians 5 : 1, 4

Jesus fulfilled the entire LAW on Calvary, and God confirmed it by rending the veil of the temple in two, (from top to bottom, by a divine hand, please note), -- the way into the Holy of Holies of the Temple was now open, the Law had been absolutely fulfilled, finished, and completed.

GRACE was the sole winner, a new dispensation and method of God's dealing with humanity had been commenced and continues until Jesus second coming and return in glory.

But the Jews later crept back and stitched up the torn veil of the Temple and carried on as before - and likewise so does much of Religion today - they offer a 'stitched up' version of defunct LAW as "living a Christian life"

And that is the main message of Paul's letter to the Galatians - the Legalists were already at work in his day, and have continued down through the centuries until this very day and time.

So the spiritual Cancer of LEGALISM lives on in Christian assemblies throughout New Zealand and indeed the planet, but its result is still the same as physical Cancer - death. It should be disposed of and buried as quickly as a physical corpse is - within 3 days !
Or the neighbours will complain about the smell !

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty 2 Corinthians 3 : 17

"God is not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in certain prescribed ways, but a personal Saviour who sets us free to live a free life. God did not coerce us from without, but set us free from within freedom is a delicate and subtle gift, easily perverted and often squandered"

'The Message Bible' - Introduction to Galatians by Eugene Peterson

what legalism is and what it is not

As referred to previously, a lot of mankind's other mistakes have been swept under the umbrella of the fearsome word LEGALISM

And oft times, during conversation, the comment has been made to me that "so and so was legalistic" or that "such and such a Church was getting too legalistic"

My observation of these people and the Churches mentioned led me to ponder just what it was that had led that person to that conclusion, and I wondered if the term was too loosely applied, or to encompass more than Scriptures definition and warning of the term.

Considering this led to these thoughts on Legalism

What it is and also WHAT IT IS NOT

what Legalism is ...

The previous Chapter defines what it is - a spiritual Cancer that opposes Grace

A dictionary meaning of the word Legal is ... of the Law, according to the Law, of Mosaic Law, based on Mosaic Law, reliance on salvation by good works rather than free grace, adherence to Mosaic Law rather than the Gospel of Grace

In modern day Church practice, Legalism centres on 2 main points:
The impression or belief that God's blessing, gifts or favour are only bestowed on those who led 'holy' or righteous lives.

That obedience to religious observances, rules and regulations bring God's favour and blessing

It is a curious but real fact that 'born-again' Christians, having been saved by grace through Faith, can fall in to the subtle trap of coming to depend on good works, 'holy' living, form and observances to please God - thus becoming like the Pharisees of old

.. holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord Hebrews 12:14
is used as a club to support the necessity of earning Gods favour

But in Galatia there were 2 forms of error - firstly that obedience to the Law is mingled with Faith for justification, and secondly, that a 'born again' believer is made perfect by keeping Mosaic Law

Holiness is imputed, not earned.

No amount of self works can add to a complete and full salvation

Do your good works - sure, but never NEVER depend on them.

For by grace are you saved through Faith, and that NOT of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast
Ephesians 2 : 8, 9

And that is what Paul was on about to the Galatians
By the works of the Law shall no man be justified *Galatians 2 : 16*

God desires us to grow in holiness or rather wholeness, but not to depend on our deeds for his gifts

The just shall live by FAITH *Romans 1 : 17*

The desire to make people conform is also an essential part of Legalism. Members of a cult or a cultish Church dress alike, with look-alike hairstyles (consider the exclusive Brethren) and in their speech - there's a 'stamp' about them, as if they've come out of the same mould. The Pharisees of old times would have had all these characteristics also - they could be 'picked a mile off'

Conformity is mans effort to dominate and control, to subjugate an individuals personality to a common 'approved' style, and basically comes from the personal insecurity of the Founder, by petty rules, one mans standards, particularly exhibited in clothing and hairstyles of the members and the hierarchy. The Pharisees had added about 1000 'ordinances' to the original 10 commandments of Moses, and Jesus found himself at odds with them concerning these minor rules continually.

Legalism thrives on conformity.

what Legalism is NOT ...

And this is where confusion can come in

Legalism is NOT ORDER Nor is it DISCIPLINE

Every person or group needs a certain amount of Order and Discipline or else there will be chaos and confusion, but these in themselves do not make for Legalism.

Sure they can lead a person into Legalism, and there is plenty of both excessive Order and Discipline to be found within Legalism, but in themselves they are NOT Legalism

By being enforced or demanded, they can both lead into Legalism - the choice is with the individual alone, and whose voice he listens to and follows - the Minister chap, or the inner still small voice of the Shepherd / Master / Holy Spirit within.

Order - each and every group of people require some semblance of Order

The entire Universe and all of creation is orderly - the stars do not roam willy-nilly across the sky, the sun comes up each morning and sets each evening, it doesn't transverse randomly, the seasons and the tides are ordered, the whole of nature is ordered and orderly. Yet there is individual freedom for all of Gods living creation within that order, but within prescribed boundaries and limits.

let all things be done decently and in order *1 Corinthians 14 : 40*

Individually each group needs a minimal degree of order, but when this order is imposed or demanded, when it becomes all dominating, then and then only it becomes control and negates.

Likewise Discipline - we all need our own personal self -discipline *Luke 9 : 23* speaks of the necessity for self denial, but again it is not to be imposed or Legalism rears its ugly head yet again. It can only come from the individual heeding the inner voice of the Shepherd

A local school motto is written over the entrance gates ...
'From discipline comes liberty' and that is very true
Self -control, temperance, moderation are all desirable attributes, but for the Christian these are the fruit of the Spirit dwelling within

Galatians 5 : 23

As such they are a product of the Christian life having been grafted in, and then being lived and outworked.

Personal Discipline should and indeed must be outworked for our own personal benefit.

But in itself discipline is not Legalism, but again it can subtly lead any person into its deadly grip.

To know the difference between personal self discipline / group order and Legalism is absolutely vital for the well being of our Christian life -

we must rightly discern where each starts and stops, or Legalism will have its own way with us, to our peril

For further reading :

LEGALISM	by Hadyn Olsen
PILGRIMS PROGRESS	by John Bunyan
WHAT'S SO AMAZING ABOUT GRACE	by Philip Yancey

Freedom is a delicate and subtle gift, easily perverted and often squandered
Eugene Peterson

tithing

9

An often found companion of legalism - the tithe.

Surprisingly it is very commonplace in Pentecostal assemblies - the phrase "you will now be waited on for your 'tithes and offerings' " slips off a ministers tongue so easily, and is accepted so readily by individuals and entire congregations.

The Tithe - 10% of ones income (and still much discussed as to whether it should be calculated on the gross or net income)

At one central Auckland Pentecostal church service, I heard (and also read it in the hand-out that morning) that tithing was a requirement for Church membership at that particular assembly - and it was expected by Automatic Payment from ones bank account at that, and those who weren't tithing could soon expect to receive a personal visit from the Pastor !

The tithe - but how else could a Churches income be derived, the minister's wages be paid, and the buildings maintained ?

What biblical requirement is it, what is its origin, and why is it still being rigidly applied by so many Churches today ? And why is it such a frequent doctrine held by those exercising authoritarian control however charismatic they may be, and such a strong indicator of the presence of Legalism in an assembly.

And why is it that virtually all of the Cults advocate its practice ? - e.g. the Mormons

(Several people have done an exhaustive in depth study of this subject, particularly Graeme Carle - 'Eating Sacred Cows, a new look at tithing', published by Emmaus Road, Wellington, New Zealand in 1994.

Shaun Kearney – 'The Countefeit Church' for a most comprehensive study)

The basic facts surrounding Tithing are these :

The first occasion of tithing is by Abraham, and predates the giving of the Law to Moses by some 400 years, so its origin was quite separate from the Law.

'Father Abraham' obviously gave in faith from love and gratitude alone, (as we now similarly do by and under grace)

And please note that Abraham's giving was from the spoils of war - it was definitely not as 10% of his regular annual income, as we are now led to believe

It became mandatory under the Law, NOT as commonly thought to support the Levite priests, but to provide the Israelites themselves with a week-long feast - in contemporary terminology - it was holiday pay !

For 2 out of 3 years it was eaten by the tither, for only the third year was it given away to the Levite priest, along with the alien, orphan and widow

Jesus occasionally made mention of tithing, and some observers thereby take his mention of it as an endorsement of it, but it is absolutely vital to remember that Jesus was born and lived his entire life under the Law.

It was not until the moment of his death on Calvary that the Law ended, signified by the veil of the Temple being rent in two. The 4 Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John should really have been attached to the Old Testament, not the New, as the vast part of them, up until the moment of Jesus death, was lived under the dispensation of the Law. The New Testament should therefore really start with the book of Acts, plus only the last few verses of the Gospels recording after Jesus death.

With the New Testament, Salvation and Grace are the free gift of God, not of works, so likewise is the grace of giving money back to God, to his people, and to the needy.

Nowhere, but nowhere, in the New Testament (after Jesus death) is the tithe stated as being still in operation, search the book of Acts and the Epistles in vain. Instead, collections were made in the early Church times on specific occasions for distribution to the poor and needy

Paul actually supported himself - and those who were with him
*These (my own) hands have laboured for my own necessities (upkeep),
and to them who were with me* *Acts 20 : 34*

I (Paul) have done none of these things (sought financial support from others) neither have I written such things 1 Corinthians 9 : 15

Neither did we eat any person's food for nothing, but we worked hard with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be indebted to any of you. Not because this was compulsory, but to make ourselves an example, for you to follow us (our example)

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work neither should he eat 2 Thessalonians 3 : 8 - 10

He was a part-time minister, not dependent on the tithing or support of others. In fact he says here that those idle and voluntarily without unemployment should not be given food to eat as a discouragement to idleness (Note - not those who could not work, but those who would not work) and as an incentive to work and support themselves financially

The ministers of God should therefore by Paul's example basically support themselves instead of living off God's people (what a revolution that would cause in Church circles if put into practice)

And, what a difference all of this makes to coerced giving, and tithing ! The Law and tithe ceased with Jesus death, from then on it is Grace and a freewill offering of ourselves and our wallets to God. There is NO compulsory giving nor collections advocated by Scripture to ministers, priests or a 'Church' organisation (For approx 300 years there was no established 'Churches', only 'house churches / groups')

We should only give as guided by the Holy Spirit on specific occasions and instances, and to the poor and needy as much as to Christian needs.

Our giving should be as much spirit led as any other aspect of the Christian life, - as much as our worship, as much as our singing, as much as our witnessing.

Imagine if you would, what each of these other giftings or functions of the New Testament Christian life would be like if they were commanded, mandatory, controlled, or by decree - that is what the Law dispensation was, and why grace is described in Hebrews as being so much 'better' than legality or compulsion

Indeed, to follow the recorded New Testament pattern *Acts 2 : 44, 45, / 3 : 32 - 36*

let there be a selling of possession, goods, lands and houses and an equal sharing to each person according to need. But, please don't presume to try to convince me that according to New Testament Scripture the mandatory tithe is still in operation !

There is more New Testament justification for the practice of circumcision than there is to support Tithing *Acts 16 : 3*

We have been conned, and our wallets ransacked - and again by 'Churchianity' and the religious system.

We have been inveigled into supporting full-time clergy and spasmodically used Church buildings. Without the imposition of the tithe, how the lifestyle of the clergy would drastically change, people would be free to meet needs as they are led by God himself, the world would take notice as individuals funds went to meet real community and personal needs instead of just to keep Churches and religious systems in existence.

We are free before God, well able to be individually led by His Spirit within, our wallets to be opened generously only when He prompts. Anything else, anything more, is but another return to the Law and the legal system which Jesus died to fulfill and to free us from.

As the years flick past, a piece of wisdom to consider ...

Do your giving, while you're living
Then you'll be knowing where its going !

twice to the temple

10

An extraordinary thing occurred at the Passover

The whole emphasis of the Old Testament was to fore-tell and prepare for the arrival of the Messiah. A Messiah, a deliverer ... who would bring freedom to the Jewish nation from what ever variety of servitude they found themselves under, and there had been plenty of occasions of such down through the previous centuries - foreign domination, national bondage, and even into slavery.

Everyone expected the Messiah to arrive as a king, or a conquering military man, bringing a forceful military deliverance to the nation

Jesus had grown up in the provinces and was taken by **his parents** who **went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover Luke 2:41**

And now he was going up to Jerusalem, for the Passover, again. But this time his visit was to be very very different

A few days before this trip he had been invited with his parents to a wedding in Cana of Galilee and had rescued the celebrations by miraculously turning pots of water into wine when the supply had ran out. This was his first miracle *John 2 : 1 - 11*

Now he entered Jerusalem and approached the Temple – was He going to announce Himself as the long – awaited Messiah ?? Would the High priest and the temple officials receive him ??

Not quite. He looked inside the Temple, and took in the scene

He found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves with exchangers of money sitting His response was dramatic and unexpected – the carpenters son seemed to be gathering cords

together, and to be making something with his hands, then ... action.

And when He had made a scourge (whip) of small cords he drove them all out of the Temple, and the sheep, and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overturned the tables.

And he said to them Take these things away, do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise *John 2 : 13 - 16*

And that is how the Gospel of John alone records it -- after attending the wedding at Cana, the very first action of his public ministry was to visit the Temple and to cleanse it by physically driving out those who had turned it into a market place, those who were making money by selling sacrificial animals within the Temple itself. The temple priests and hierarchy had turned a house of Prayer into a money making venture and had even created a temple currency for buying the sacrifices. They had also become money changers thus reaping another nice fat profit..

And so he announced the start of his ministry in Jerusalem and the temple, by a very significant act – a personal visit to the Temple. Not by a formal announcement of who he was and his purpose, but by a personal visit to the Temple and the High Priest. His angry actions in holy zeal and indignation were then against what the temple priests had become – profiteering traders, and that within the very temple itself. Instead of helping the people they were exploiting them !

As the Messiah, Jesus should have just arrived at the Temple, announced himself as who he was – the long anticipated Messiah / deliverer, and the High Priest should have willingly handed over the keys to the Temple and presented him to the people.

So Jesus left the scene, and continued his ministry of healing and deliverance around Galilee and Judea for the next 3 years
Then, the time of what was to be his last visit to Jerusalem and the Passover come around

The 3 other Gospels of Matthew Mark and Luke record it this time
Matthew 21 : 12 Mark 11 : 15 Luke 19 : 45

Again he visited the Temple. (Another very significant act, one of his last visits and actions on this earth)

Again he found the business of trading and money changing within the temple had continued on from his earlier visit 3 years before.

Nothing had changed – they had obviously rounded up the animals that he had driven out and scattered, reset the tables and carried on as before he entered.

Again he took physical action

Matthew records it this way

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. And said to them, It is written, My House shall be called the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves

Strong words indeed - ***a den of thieves.***

He called them for what they had become – thieves masquerading as priests

Foretold by *Jeremiah 7 : 11* some 600 years previously ... ***Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers Behold even I have seen it, says the Lord***

Not only had they carried on trading as before his first visit, they had gotten worse, they had deteriorated, and were now robbing the people, (possibly by selling diseased animals at inflated prices as *Malachi 1 : 8* had described 400 years before)

A few days later they “got him”, or rather bought his capture with 40 pieces of their ill-gotten gains, and had him put to death, not for the least reason of interfering with their temple trading and profiteering, and what Jesus called ***temple theft***

How much has changed in this day and age ??
See any parallels in today’s Church scene ??

Trading in the temple and temple theft continues unabated around the globe.

Grander and lavish Temples have been erected. – it is estimated that \$US 40 billion annually is spent on “Church” buildings in the USA alone.

The traders still operate in Church edifices portrayed as supposed houses of God, but now by advocating the keeping of a tithe which was made defunct by the death of Jesus and the passing of the Law Covenant

Clergy and priests, pastors and ministers have become professionals, on salaries, living comfortably if not lavishly, when John the Baptist lived of the land, Paul earned his own keep and was chargeable to no man, Jesus though a carpenter’s son, never built a church building.

My House shall be called the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves was His pronouncement then - what would he think about such in this day and age ?

And temple theft continues worldwide, unabated, as we speak.

When Jesus returns will he see any difference at all within Christendom's many "temples"

Dear God forgive us all

PS A most interesting Postscript indeed

A close friend much in contact with Israelis, knowledgeable in the Torah and matters Jewish, tells me that ::

Jews today can be divided into two major camps -

1. Ashkenazim = originate from Poland and Germany but basically encompass Western and Eastern Europe.

2. Sephardim = originate from Spain and Portugal but scattered to places like North Africa, Iraq and other Arab countries

Because religious Jews don't handle money in the Synagogue on Shabbat, 'offerings' for the maintenance of their institution come via other methods.

Ashkenazim sell the rights to sit in the seats of the synagogue to their members. Each member has bought his or her seat.

Sephardim auction the rights (to the highest bidder) to do certain tasks such as opening the doors of the compartment that contain the Torah scrolls. In doing this they also receive a special blessing from the Rabbi. We were recently told by an Israeli guest that the task just mentioned was sold in an Israeli synagogue for NZ\$40,000 - and this represented a once-only task for the buyer. In other words, it would be auctioned repeatedly. This means only the rich get the special blessings.

Both groups also have other fund raising schemes.

So, not much has changed would you say – if Jesus came back today and went once more to the modern version of the Temple / synagogue,

he would probably do the modern equivalent of the same thing all over again

And yet another point

The priesthood at the time of Jesus was thoroughly corrupt. The high priestly dynasty of Zadok was lost a number of centuries before the time of Jesus. Different factions promoted their own preferred leaders. Later high priests such as Caiphas (the one who condemned Jesus) usurped the position. The Romans auctioned the high priesthood to the highest bidder from among the priestly families, selling the office for a two-year term. The high priestly vestments were held in the royal palace of Herod and each morning the high priest had to collect the garments from the Roman ruler as a symbol of submission to higher authority.

The religious system, dependent on dubious fund raising schemes.

the 2 strongholds

11

Considering what has been written previously, I have reached a conclusion - that 'Churchianity' and the survival of the Cults and so many churches, depends simply and solely on 2 main factors or ingredients - take these away and their power, influence, and even their very existence would be fundamentally threatened and eroded - in point of fact many of them would soon cease to exist.

What are these 2 factors on which many Churches, and all the Cults, absolutely depend ?

The first one is **TITLES**

Instead of calling the founder, or their successors ... **PASTOR**, (or whatever other Title is given to the Founder / leader) Imagine if that leader, if that person, was simply called Fred, (or Bryce, or Cyril) - the whole aura of specialness, of spiritual supremacy, of personal holiness, of spiritual mystique, would be gone, and they would have to actually demonstrate the evidence of Gods calling and anointing on their lives - take away the power of that Title, and the frail, weak, ordinary, fallible human beings posing as clergy would be exposed for all the congregation to see. Many leaders maintain their role solely by the usage of a Title - and the people reinforce their subjection to a religious system every time that they utter that Title..

The Second one is **The TITHE**

Consider the usual collection call - "you will now be waited on for your Tithes and offerings" and sometimes even the word 'Freewill' is slipped in to placate a thoughtful observer, but in reality its effect is overawed by the power of following word **TITHE**

If this call was not to be made - instead, if there was only a box where truly freewill offerings could be placed, or, if only verifiable and specific needs were announced and collections were made for !

The vital income of the Clergy and the buildings maintenance would be shredded.

The whole system would soon crumple as the 'life-blood' of cash-flow would diminish..

A total rethink would have to be made - the clergy would have to largely work and support themselves, instead of the maintenance and upkeep of costly and lavish buildings (largely a memorial to the founder), home groups would have to function.

And the needs of the local poor and destitute would be met - and Christians would have to get to know their neighbours, and personally **get involved in their community**

And Christians would be known by their faith with deeds following alone,
and God would be glorified,
and another book of Acts would be written,
and the world would be turned upside down yet again,
and Jesus would be able to return for his spotless bride

WOW

**The human heart is rather like a garden If left unattended for
long, it will produce weeds !**

The cost of LIBERTY is ... CONSTANT VIGILANCE

For as long as there has been civilisation, for as long as people have met for a common religious purpose, for as long as there have been strong leaders, there probably have been CULTS.

How exactly would you recognise a Cult member if you met one in the street, or how would you detect a Church exhibiting Cultish tendencies ?

Or, if you have just received an invitation to attend a religious meeting, and you're not quite sure about just what you're going to let yourself in for.

Or, if you have already started attending a religious group and you're not too happy about some of the vibes that you're picking up

Or, if you have been attending a particular group for a while, and the ministry is starting to give you some concerns and misgivings, and other people are starting to leave the group, and little things from your past experiences make you nervous, and you feel that your focus of that group needs adjusting.

HOW exactly, how, can you recognise a CULT in actuality or in formation ?

What exactly is a Cult, and what are Cultish tendencies that a Church group can exhibit ?

how to recognise a cult and 'Cultish style' churches

Most of us have had our homes visited at some time by a pair of young 'missionaries' with a request to pray with you, or to leave you some little message of peace, or to hopefully sell you a religious publication, or perhaps offer you a Bible Study, or whatever. More frequently of

late, they noticeably have young children in accompaniment to help soften your heartstrings.

Whatever their approach technique, you probably know these unsolicited visitors who come to your door (and usually at a most inconvenient time)

These are the obvious world-wide 'Cults' that give themselves the title of 'Church', and using door-to-door, house-to-house visitation on a regular basis for recruiting new members.

They usually have their own version of the Bible, plus their own particular interpretation of key passages of it, completed with their own added doctrines. Commonly, they have been formed by a strong charismatic 'Founder' or 'Father figure' or woman. These are the well known and recognised international Cults, usually with their roots in the U.S.America, (where several of them were founded in the mid 19th century) financially secure and growing with ardent missionary zeal and endeavour.

But, what about the 'authentic' local Christian groups that have started out with a more or less true Bible doctrine base, than have slowly started to exhibit attitudes and tendencies that may be termed 'Cultish' ? How does any one pick them out from amongst other valid Churches, and how do you test their authenticity ?

Alas, many Church groups have commenced with zeal, vigour and enthusiasm and attracted growth. Then, sometime along the way, incidents happen and suddenly the Minister is faced with a vital decision - to leave the people in freedom under God for Him to direct and sort out any problem, or to step in and CONTROL the situation. And this is the very point where most Cultish tendencies begin - in the Founders or ministers attitude to personal freedoms and circumstances and situations. If he decides on control, a cult can begin to be formed. It is one of mankind's greatest weaknesses - to fear unknown possibilities and to desire to manage or control situations. To have things done ONE particular way, that overrides any personal liberty. Carried to an extreme, it brings spiritual bondage or even spiritual 'slavery'. Such was the case with Jim Jones and his group, when approximately 1,000 people followed his instructions to death at Jonestown in South America in 1978

And in 1993 at Waco Texas with Michael Kornish - the same Cultish principle at work, with yet another tragic ending for those keen but undiscerning followers

The big word and the single dominant factor of the international Cults and those Churches exhibiting Cultish tendencies is CONTROL - or AUTHORITARIAN rule, both in the Church's organisation and extending into the members personal freedom.

In spiritual terms, it is CULTISH as methods, forms and rules become more important than free worship. Its roots invariably lie deep in the Founders own personality - often he is or was basically very insecure himself and projects this on to his followers - subject oneself totally to the rules or leave with a curse hanging over that action.

'father- figure'

One feature that is so common as to be universal amongst Cult or groups with cultish tendencies is the presence of a strong charismatic 'father - figure'

Usually he (or occasionally she) is an able public speaker with the ability to hold and sway a congregation or group of people - without this ability their influence would be minimal. Their authority is conveyed by words and manner, but also by another means - a Title either given or assumed, by which the 'flock' know and recognise them. This title, be it 'Father' or 'Pastor' or 'the Chief' or whatever, is actually the most important and vital element in establishing their authority and control over the flock.

By the use of this Title, their followers, by the words of their mouth, each time that they utter the Title, unconsciously confess themselves as being under their explicit and inordinate guidance and direction of the leader, and by its utterance control is unconsciously confessed and yielded to. Jesus was well aware of the power of a title to establish and maintain control when he expressly forbade the use of any such Title ***but you, do not be called 'Rabbi' (teacher) for one is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your Father, for one is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called Teachers, for one is your Teacher, the Christ***

Matthew 23 : 8 - 10

Matthew Henry, in his bible commentary written in about 1712, and still widely referred to today, says about these verses :

1 Christ's ministers must not affect the name of Rabbi or Master, by way of distinction from other people; it is not agreeable to the simplicity

of the gospel, for them to covet or accept the honour which they have that are in the kings palaces.

2 They must not assume the authority and dominion implied in those names; they must not be magisterial, nor domineer over their brethren, or over God's heritage, as if they had dominion over the faith of Christians

In other things they must not make their opinions and wills a rule and standard to other people, to be admitted with an implicit obedience

Christ only is our Master, ministers are but ushers in the school

If he only be our Master. then for his ministers to set up for dictators, and to pretend to a supremacy and an infallibility, is a daring usurpation of that honour of Christ which he will not give to another. Constitute no

man the father of your religion, that is, the founder, author, director, nor governor, of it. God only must be allowed as the father of our spirits.

Our religion must not be derived from, nor made to depend upon, any man. The will of man, not being the rise of our religion, must not be the rule of it. St Paul calls himself a father to those whose conversion he had been an instrument of, (*1 Corinthians 1: 5, Philemon 10*) but he pretends no dominion over them, and uses that Title to denote, not authority, but affection.

Hebrews 13 : 17 is another verse well used to establish and maintain control

But obey those that have the rule over you, that they may do it with joy and not with grief

Matthew Henry says about this verse

“It is not an implicit obedience, nor absolute submission, that is here required, but only as far as is agreeable to the mind and will of God revealed in His word

They are not to make laws of their own, but to interpret the laws of God; nor is their interpretation to be immediately received without examination, but the people must search the Scriptures, and so far as the instructions of their minister are according to that rule they ought to receive them

They must give an account of how they have discharged their duty, and what has become of the souls committed to their trust, whether any have been lost through their neglect”

The role of a true Church leader, and of a true minister, pastor, or man of God, is simply to awaken a person to their eternal responsibility and choice, to activate ones conscience by the influence of the Holy Spirit on

that person's life, to bring them to salvation and into a relationship with God, thereafter to be led by the Spirit of God directly. A minister should care and nurture and counsel believers, not to interfere or overstep into an individual's personal freedom, not to impose his own regulations and traditions on a free child of God.

It is not the minister's role to do the work of the Holy Spirit or to exert control in any form. There is a vast difference between true spiritual counsel and cultish control, manipulation or conditioning.

The scriptural way to test a Church or group is to simply test the 'fruit' which is the personal result in an individual's life as distinct from being processed into a passive follower of a group.

common hallmarks

Some of the other usual or the most common hallmarks of a Cult or Cultish tendencies that a group or Church may exhibit are these :

Invariably, they regard themselves as having **more spiritual 'enlightenment'** and spiritual insight than other groups and denominations, whom they look down on. As a result, spiritual pride enters in, and they regard themselves as being the 'true Christian remnant' in that locality or even world-wide ! A condescending attitude to other Churches becomes evident (holier than thou)

They separate themselves from most other Churches and groups in the area, working individually (except when it suits them, or for appearances eg. big rallies or national topics when cheap publicity can be obtained) They do not mix readily or function spiritually with other Christians, unless they can control or dominate the proceedings.

They are very evangelical usually, but with mixed motives. People are converted not just to Christ, but are also converted to the particular group (this may be hotly denied by them, but it is absolutely true) Their appeal is especially to naive and searching young people, and to those with insecurities, fears, and personal problems, but with inexperience and naivety to manipulative methods and the dangers of a Cult, Their evangelical approach is usually well practiced and honed and usually **very slick** in its presentation.

They are not missionary minded to the general 'Body of Christ', always **working independently** (except in selected groups or rallies or occasions, attended by only the trusted 'diehards' of the movement)

There is a **strong tradition** within the group, they favour only the 'one way' that anything should ever be done (the Founder's way usually)
Flexibility is not one of their hallmarks

They resist change in traditions and mode of worship, and in doctrines and interpretations (for the simple reason that the Founder knew it all, and was considered as being virtually infallible) Their mode of dress and behaviour is very similar - look-alikeness prevails. (One can easily pick them out in a group)

A persecution complex develops - they regard people who speak against them as being persecutors bringing 'persecution' against the group, whom they regard as 'division makers' and as enemies to be avoided at all costs and spoken against. **They cannot receive any comment or adverse criticism** from any quarter - they regard themselves as the 'enlightened ones' to whom God alone can speak and rebuke.

Individuals are required to conform to the pattern and standards of the group in all ways, in dress, and even in haircuts and hairstyles, and of course in attitudes and beliefs. If not spoken then these attitudes are conveyed subtly by showing approval or disapproval.

The men of the group are subtly and effectively **emasculated** within the group and eventually within their own families. The men's authority is usurped by the ministry or 'oversight' of the group. (Again this would never be acknowledged by the group, but is well evidenced in actual practice). Eventually, the group leader's authority supplants that of the men, whose personality and confidence is eroded and suffers as a consequence.

Likewise, **the suppression and subjugation of the women** within the group to the authority, not of the men, but **to the group's leaders** or 'oversight'. Rules and standards are imposed on women's clothing, hairstyles, hats, ornaments, etc - the outward show and 'standards' dominate personal choices.

The division of the family. Most activities and functions are 'single sex' only. Little emphasis is placed on family activities (except for attendance at meetings)

Young people are rigidly controlled (as possible), and disciplined by the Church hierarchy to an exorbitant degree, not just by the parents of the children. Many 'rules' of behaviour are established, these are not just for the individual's benefit, but for the 'testimony' of the Church. Marriage partners are advised on, and in many instances partners even suggested and arranged. Rules on courting are imposed by the Church hierarchy, over and above those suggested by the parents. (Active rebellion by young people is often the direct result of these imposed rules)

Members are kept busy - after all, busy and physically tired people are not so apt to think originally, or to question procedures. An excessive number of meetings and Church organised activities are instigated, with a lot of individual involvement in what otherwise would be an individual's spare time. Internal 'promotions' and activities keep the upset person, or 'thinkers' within the group very busy (if people start asking too many questions - then give them a job to do)

Internal **gossip and reporting on each other** within the group, but so subtly done under the guise of 'watching for each others soul' and 'walking the light'. Encouragement is subtly given to report and tell each other, and a 'grapevine[evine]' is effectively set-up. All the gossip and stories that return to the 'oversight', is to aid in the control and counselling of members - in some cases this information is used as evidence of 'spiritual discernment' or revelation by the 'oversight' hierarchy.

Censorship of books, tapes, etc, by the endorsement of the ministry or 'oversight' : by word of mouth, through the library or such like.

FEAR, shuddering Fear. Personal insecurities are not helped, but exploited.

Fear is used to restrain people within the group, by repeated stories of what has happened to those who left, (a very successful strategy to quieten the restless), but these stories are always one sided only - the actual facts and another viewpoint usually gives quite a different slant on the events.

Financial manipulation - the encouragement (even compulsion) to **tithe**, but to the group's benefit, with little (if any) distribution to other Churches or to the general Body of Christ (except for public show on certain occasions)

Intermarriage within the group, ensures control and discouragement to those considering leaving (and of course the offspring adds to the group's numbers) The resultant 'birdsneast' of entwinement is often bewildering an complex) This can extend to divorce subtly advocated where one partner is not of the same 'spiritual mind', with marriage to a spiritual member of the group being recommended of course.

The **ex-communication** In practical terms, of those who have dared to leave the group. They regard those a who have left as having 'left Christ' and en-route to hell. Those who have left are to be snubbed , shunned, avoided in public with only the minimal greeting possible. All associations with those left to be minimised or severed, e.g. in business, holidays, and friendships, socially, etc They regard those who have left as 'division makers', rebels, and even as 'heretics'. And the amount of trauma associated with leaving is so revealing as to the group's attitudes. Perhaps the greatest test as to whether a group has Cultish tendencies is simply this - do the people who have left feel free to pop back in for a visit ? - this simple fact can reveal so much about a group.

But the main factor is always **CONTROL**. Control that extends from the group's leadership, officers and hierarchy, oversight or whatever their name. Control that reaches right down into individual family matters, personal decisions, etc - into work and employment, into friendships and associations, into holidays and social occasions, into family events, (birthday parties, weddings, and other functions). Dependency is developed on the group for security feelings and personal associations.

In essence a Cult or cultish Churches always favour **IN-WORKING** within the group.

OUT-WORKING in society is not favoured, except as an arranged 'Testimony' and to attract other converts

Each one of the Hallmarks listed above has a right Christian way of application to a person's benefit, but in a Cult situation, such things are done in the wrong way or from wrong motives.

Many of a Cult's methods are very subtle in practice - they are chains of silk, velvet or gold, not metallic or iron which would be the more easy to recognise. Often the worst evil is a corruption of the best and good thing. The most dangerous Lie is not a barefaced downright Lie, but one that has been mixed with a proportion of the truth - a part Lie is the hardest one to pick.

the 'second conversion'

Within the Cults, and cultish Churches and groups, when a person is 'converted' to Christ, there is actually a double conversion that occurs. The first conversion is to Jesus and to God, but there is also a hidden and usually a subconscious second conversion, not fully realised nor appreciated - to the Cult or to the group itself. Soon after the first conversion, the second slowly becomes apparent. "You don't need to go to any other Church or group - you need only attend this one" "We have great light" "Be faithful to where you are called", (Not just to whom you are called).

The first and true conversion is to a person - Jesus, and to God, the second and false conversion is to a place - where the Cult or group meets.

The first conversion to Jesus, should bring life and liberty, freedom. The second conversion, to the Cult, brings bondage, control and then leads directly into Legalism - trying to please God by works and performance, instead of by grace and faith alone

This hidden or underlying conversion easily degenerates with some groups into becoming the principal reason for seeking souls and evangelism - simply to build up the numbers of the group. Jesus warns specifically against this which is called 'proselytising'

for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte

Matthew 23 : 15

What happens is that the drawing power of the Holy Spirit of God diminishes to be replaced by man's natural efforts (the compassing of land and sea), and a natural means of enticement takes over.

Jesus specifically said that His sheep, after being saved ***would go in and out and find pasture***

John 10 : 9

faithfulness ?

While regular attendance at the place where a person was converted, and commitment to a particular ministry is advocated as a good way to ensure personal growth and fruitfulness, to be locked into that for a lifetime is definitely not scriptural, and can stifle a person's growth and development, as well as the personal leading of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture has several instances against the 'be faithful where you are called' notion that the Cults and Cultish Churches are so fond of advocating

Acts 1 : 8 where the risen Lord showed that our witness should enlarge from one initial calling to ***be witness unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*** This enlargement should extend to the whole body of Christ wherever and whenever and however God may lead.

Acts 8 where Philip, after having led the Ethiopian Eunuch to salvation, was taken away.

The popular referral to *1 Corinthians 7 : 20* ***Let every person abide in the same calling wherein they are called*** as a principle for staying at the same Church or group until death, is patently false when the next 2 verses 21 & 23 are read

are you called as a servant (slave)?, don't be concerned about it, but if an opportunity arises to be free, take it. For he that is called in the Lord being a servant is free in the Lord, likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant (slave).

The context of this verse is therefore obviously about being a servant or slave (as was common in that era), as opposed to being free (not a slave).

There is absolutely no context in these verses about staying at the one Church or group for your entire lifetime, and to indicate that such is the case is to misquote Scripture for advantage, and any person or group that does so thereby becomes guilty of being a charlatan and rendering Scripture to personal advantage.

cult 'advantages'

the security of a group - its "safe" , protected,
the leaders will look out for you (supposedly)
the safety of numbers – the gang mentality

A feeling of belonging, of contributing, to a cause, of having a flag to follow

Having decisions made for you, saves a lot of bother and personal effort just follow what the chap in the pulpit says, he will steer the ship for you

Intermarriage possibilities for yourself and your children amongst "nice clean" people

Business advantage in the Church "market place::
each attendee is a potential customer or client

The chance to be someone, to rise up through the ranks perchance,
To feel that you are making a contribution, that you matter, that you can climb to a position of some importance.

religious marketplace

13

Unto whom shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like,

They are like children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying ... We have piped unto you and you have not danced, we have mourned to you and you have not wept.

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say He has a devil.

But I the Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say – behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and prostitutes

Luke 7 : 30 – 35

Whatever was going on ?

The great itinerant Teacher that had attracted such a large and popular following wherever he went by performing such mighty deeds of healing and miracles throughout Israel, seemed unusually upset and was speaking very strongly.

He who displayed such grace and truth, with compassion and empathy, whom God had plainly and obviously anointed with his Spirit without measure, who went about doing good to ordinary people and healing all who were oppressed by the enemy in whatever fashion, was speaking out most sharply and pointedly indeed.

And to what section of his audience was he directing these cutting words from God's viewpoint and perspective that vividly exposed wrong motives and hidden thoughts ?

Lets listen in !

Unto whom shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like, he asked pointedly, and then proceeded to answer his own question

Children sitting in the marketplace indeed - could he possibly be referring to those 'men of the cloth' who had made religion their livelihood, the rich and powerful practitioners of the established and elaborate religious ritual of the Temple and synagogue ?

Children in the sense of a lack of understanding perhaps, or even 'spiritually blind' as he had referred to them before in Matthew 23

The professional theologians who **sat** - established and settled in the secure marketplace of their own denomination or assembly, and who had made a business and a good living out of establishing religion into an enterprise that owned bricks and mortar, and turned a divine commission into a 'market' – what a cutting observation that would raise hackles and would surely not sit well with his hearers --- did he not care for the effect of his words ?

Marketplace indeed - that one was rather obvious - they had turned the things of God into a marketable commodity, into revenue, into a marketable business, with management structures, ornateness, fine robes, and elaborate ritual, and extracted an exorbitant lifestyle from the adherents by costly sacrificing and tithe extraction.

And with all the trappings that go with a "market" or a business in this day and age = mission statements (how noble sounding), business plans, budgets, fund raising techniques, boards and directors, committees and agendas, appeals, etc etc

calling one to another - so much of their time spent unconsciously competing with each other, in 'Holy Huddles', seminars, conferences, papers and articles written for their colleagues on the fine points of theology - not really of much interest to the general populace. Performances orientated to impress and indoctrinate the brotherhood, instead of getting out and meeting peoples real needs - the 'Come – hear' mentality, instead of the 'Go – Tell' action that Jesus advocated and demonstrated.

And the criticism associated with each ones methods and persuasion ...

We have and you have not the many denominations each advocating their own particular doctrinal stance – from Catholics to Protestants, from Pentecostalists to Baptists, from cults to sects, each 'piping' their way, applauding themselves for what they 'have' and hold

concerning beliefs and doctrinal interpretation, and criticising others for not 'dancing' to their particular tune.

For **mourning** and admonishing others when not getting a **weeping** or a favourable response to their methodology and techniques, wondering why people haven't responded to their invitations, why others haven't come into line with their petty judgments

And the impossibility to please these religious legalistic advocates – **for John cameand you say, for I comeand you say ...** whatever any other person of any other calling does is never up to their superior standard – every other persons action is weighed and examined according to their standards and found wanting, Each other individuals lifestyle is put under their microscope and examined and compared to their own narrow range of noble criteria, and criticized accordingly.

Impossible to please, except to discard all of ones individuality and become like one of them.

And so down through the centuries to this very day, the continual rerun of Jesus words. Tele - evangelists with their constant (if veiled) appeals for funds – make one contact and see how the mailbox fills with their pleas thereafter

The religious market place taken to new levels in presentation, marketing and empire building - the amassing of property and buildings, all in an effort to "market", present and promote the product, to train and employ professionals the while, the end supposedly justifying the means.

But instead of the Church / Christians converting the world - rather the world's methods would seem to have infiltrated and virtually converted the religious Church system.

Pay your tithe by direct credit or credit card, in regular installments, they will save you all the hassle of cash

As in Jesus day, so today the religious marketers continue, only updated

All in an effort to continue the work of the itinerant Carpenter by trade, but who built no edifice or church building, who had no house nor fixed abode, but just moved around demonstrating Gods love and power with 12 assorted close followers

And no surprise to later read of Jesus efforts to cleanse the Temple of the profiteers from religious marketing and the professional marketers – he even took the time, effort and trouble to make a whip and drive them out from the Temple of the day.

Not much has changed over 2,000 years would you say, just an upgrade of the methods and techniques ?

Luke 7:30 – 35

*A passage of scripture very rarely preached on,
I wonder why !*

'strange fire'

14

Ministers of God and of the Gospel should be and are supposed to be known as

flames of fire

Hebrews 1 : 7

But there are 2 short but remarkable verses, which I wonder if they get a mention at seminaries, or if they get much of a study by 'men of the cloth'

And Nadab and Abihu. the sons of Aaron, both of them took his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord

Leviticus 10 : 1 & 2

Just what on this fair earth was so wrong with their action that God took so much exception to it, that he sent his own brand of fire and struck them down dead ?

It must have been something severely wrong for God to act immediately and so powerfully, to strike 2 men down dead was unparalleled and it shows God's absolute repulsion and anathema at their actions. What possibly could be so wrong in putting some incense into a fire, and trying to impress him and his people ?

Schofield in his notes, offers this explanation :

Fire from before the Lord had kindled upon the altar of burnt offering - the fire of which the care of the priests was to keep burning (Leviticus 6:12) No commandment had yet been given (Leviticus 16:12) as to how the incense should be kindled. The sin of Nadab and Abihu was in acting in the things of God without seeking the mind of God. It was 'will worship' (Collosians 2:23) which often has a show of 'wisdom and humility' It typifies any use of carnal means to kindle the fire of devotion and praise.

And this is the point of these 2 remarkable verses - carnal i.e. natural means, no matter how beautiful, ornate, desirable, rapturous, talented,

applause gaining can take the place of seeking and following God's presence simply and quietly.
Impact with God and with men, is not just making noise, and creating a big impression.

Worldly performances, brilliant oratory, raptuous singing, even in a church building or religious setting, is not necessarily pleasing to God, does not necessarily bring down God's blessing.,
The hungry sheep are left enchanted perhaps, but are starving still, their inward needs un-met, and their spiritual thirst unsatisfied.

How many Ra-ra- ra efforts are witnessed at especially so-called 'Pentecostal' services ?

How much hype and build-up attaches to overseas speakers and their performances, and their retinues ?

How much rev -up, emotional and mass psychological manipulation has invaded the religious scene in the name of impacting for God

If the fire of God did indeed fall it may be rather different from what the leaders are seeking - it may take out some of the modern day descendants of Aaron sons in death !

Aaron had 4 sons who were all familiar with Moses and his presentation of God to that society, and 2 of them died in this simple act of not seeking Gods mind and ways, of presuming that God would bless their well meaning but natural methods, of seeking to impress God with their own particular brand of what proved to be but 'strange fire' and which was totally offensive to God, and at the most extreme cost to themselves.

And so, so, so very prevalent in Pentecostal circles in this day and age.

The true fire of God, we seek, Yes, - but not the natural, talented but cheap, imitation of 'strange fire'

The oft-times glib phrase so often trotted out in Pentecostal circles, - "God spoke to me" or "God told me to" oft-times used by some as a 'supreme statement' that cannot be questioned, when someone merely doesn't want to be tested about the veracity of some action.

'Starry eyed' prophecy, and much outward expression used to impress others - where oh where is the discernment and even common sense ?
(But thankfully there are still those who are truly hearing from God, and

obeying Him, as confirmed by the 'fruit of the Spirit' plainly evident in their lives)

God seeks a people to worship Him in spirit and in Truth John 4 : 2

Dear God, forgive us, and teach us anew the simplicity of seeking you from a pure heart - without emotionally generated hype and hysteria
And then let the true fire of God fall again and again amongst us and purge and empower us as on the day of Pentecost of Acts 1 & 2
Amen and amen

Fire does one of 2 things - It refines, or consumes

Christians shouldn't follow signs Signs should follow Christians !

History

15

I realise that History may well be a dry subject to some, but
'those who don't learn from History are bound to repeat it'
is a famous and often repeated quotation, and very true.

History is actually a great teacher, which apart from the Holy Spirit,
perhaps even the greatest that there is.

So, a brief backwards glance at history to appreciate our place in the
total scheme of things and to get an overview from Gods perspective
would seem a well worthwhile place to begin.

Someone commented that History could perhaps better be spelt
'His Story' for that's basically what the Bible is all about '
HIS (Jesus) Story,
His incarnation and God's dealings with people before that time

In the beginning so starts the Word of God *Genesis 1 : 1*
In the beginning, God God Himself, alone
In the beginning God created ...the Universe, the solar system,
including
planet Earth the dateless past
Plants, Animals, human beings

Then the various covenants or dispensations of God's dealing with
mankind, unfolded, in an amazing sequence :

The Garden of Eden	Innocence	4,000 BC ??
Adam	Conscience,	4,000 BC - 2,348 BC
The Fall		
Noah	Human Government	2,348 BC - 2,126 BC
Abraham	Patriachal Promise	2,126 BC - 1,491 BC

Moses **LAW** 1,491 BC - 33 AD

Jesus **GRACE** 33 AD to ???

His First Coming

His incarnation, life, death and resurrection

The early Church age, and the book of Acts, with the Church in its infancy, but with all its simplicity and empowerment, beginning as a House Church movement

Stephen - the First Christian Martyr 34 AD

Followed by the increased persecution of Christians by the Pharisees and the Romans

The Fire of Rome 64 AD
(which Nero blamed on the Christians, leading to greater persecution)

Paul His 3 missionary journeys
 planting local House Churches wherever he visited
 The writing of the New Testament letters / epistles
 much of it written while imprisoned

The sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans 70 AD

The evangelisation of the known world by widely spread and scattered missionaries. many of them simply fleeing from persecution, taking the Christian faith with them.

House Churches established in towns and cities worldwide

The first mention of infant baptism being practised 185 AD

The 'conversion' of the Roman Emperor Constantine 323 AD
Its wide reaching effect - the building of the first 'cathedral' and with it the formation of a priestly class of clergy, and eventually the crowning of a Pope

Constantine ordered the construction of 19 Christian buildings in 3 places

1 in Bethlehem, 2 in Jerusalem, 9 in Constantinople, 7 in Rome
Each named after a 1st Century saint - St John's, St Luke's etc

One was a shrine just outside Rome's walls on the side of a hill called Vaticanus

The establishment of the clergy, state sanctioned
The adaption of Babylonian trappings by this priestly class - nuns, cloisters, vestal virgins, priestly clothes, titles, incense, ritual

Christianity was declared the sole state religion 394 AD

John Chrysostom (John the Goldenmouth) Antioch 400 AD
a great heathen orator, became a believer, and from Aristotle rhetoric developed the Sunday morning sermon

Pope Gregory the Great 500 AD
Popularised the term 'Pastor' by writing a book on the pastoral duties of a priest
(Luther later endorsed and spread the role of a 'Pastor' worldwide)

Barbaric hordes

The 'dark ages' for 1,000 years
The priestly class in absolute control of institutionalised state sanctioned 'religion' headed up by a Pope

The Inquisition 1229 AD
Established by Papal decree to exterminate those deemed 'Heretics and Heresies', (all those who opposed the control and rule of the clergy) including Jews oft-times,
enforcement of the ban on laity possessing the Scriptures
Death by torture, or recant (then burned), confiscation of the 'heretic's property

Wycliffe translated the Bible into English 14 th Century

The Crusades
Anyone with differing ideas was classified as a heretic and 'exterminated'

John Calvin circa 1540 AD
Created the 'order of service' still used as a pattern for Sunday 'worship' meetings

2 Songs, a prayer, 2 more songs, offering, another prayer, then the sermon, and finally a benediction all at 11.00am each Sunday

The Council of Trent 1545 to 1563
Attended by Popes, Bishops and Cardinals, to consider the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church
Seminaries were established by this Council 1562 - 1563
Protestants soon followed the idea, establishing their own seminaries

The Reformation Martin Luther

Dwight L Moody late 1800's
brought the Sunday School to US America from England
With John R Mott, Moody began the first 2 'para-church' organizations the YMCA and the Student Volunteer Movement

The formation and rise of the Cults mid 1900's
Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons,
Christian Science, Spiritualist, etc
Mostly originated in the USA, often founded by a woman

20th Century
Sussex Street revival
The Welsh revival
The Pentecostal movement
The Charismatic movement

and the institutionalized Church system of religion and empire building continues on to this day

The Church today is looking for a visitation from God
while God all the while, is looking for a Habitation within US

the 2 trees of the garden

THE TREE of LIFE

THE TREE of KNOWLEDGE

Forbidden by God to be touched

It was God's plan for Mankind to eat The Tree of Life FIRST
Eternal Life was to be tasted BEFORE gaining Knowledge
But Mankind reversed God's intended order, and sought a Flesh
EXPERIENCE First

Some have thought that this

*Tree of KNOWLEDGE
was in fact a DRUG Plant !!
If so, it was
EATEN IN DISOBEDIENCE*

THE TREE of LIFE

THE TREE of KNOWLEDGE

A permanent Blessing

A Temporary Experience Only

A true Relationship Experience
with GOD Himself

*A "Buzz" Experience
A One-off Uplift*

True & Real

Hallucinations - Mental Experience

Of the Innermost Spirit

Of the Flesh, Carnal, Natural

Constant, lasting

A temporary Up-Lift only

Not violent highs & lows

Then despondency

Blessed to Bless others

Totally Selfish

Helps others

Spreads trouble to others

Free

Expensive, costly

Liberating

Habit Forming, Bondage

Brings Freedom Totally

*Brings dependency, enslavement
Mind Altering*

TRUTH

DECEPTION

LIFE ABUNDANT
Both here and in Eternity

Eventually DEATH

Helps and serves Others

Totally Selfish

of Strangers, Pilgrims, and Sojourners 17

On reflection it seems quite odd - how the very first phrase that I looked up in the concordance that my Mother had given to me, was about these 2 words – **strangers and pilgrims**

I heard the phrase soon after my 'born again' experience, and it intrigued me.

I explored the Bible pages, and a whole new concept slowly dawned and awakened within me

As Christians, we are not to settle down nor be counted as permanent citizens on this planet !

Sure, we all give a mental assent to that fact that our mortal life will one day end, and which we all acknowledge.. But that's about the extent of it – an acknowledgment – and we then proceed to live our life as though we will keep on living on this earth for ever.

Accidents and misfortunes always seem to happen to those around us, and merely shake us up for a while, but not to unduly upset our prevailing attitude

We spend our lives accumulating goods, even though we inwardly know that *'moth and rust will corrupt, and thieves break through and steal'*

There is a compulsion to seek comfort, to dodge inconvenience, to avoid sacrifice, to establish an empire, to beget a dynasty even, to live day by day as though we will carry on here for ever.

So, this new concept took some thinking about – it was quite revolutionary and a jolt to a budding young Architect, seeking to establish a career in creating structures of as permanent materials as possible.

A '**stranger**' - well my fellow students sure thought it strange when their buddy got 'religion' (as they called it)

Strange in not joining in all the madcap pursuits and pleasures of this so called civilised society, of going along with the antics of those you once called friends

Of being somewhat 'detached' - of being 'in the world, but not of it'

Of being 'alien' to the selfish pursuit of pleasure, selfishness, and self-indulgence

Of 'marching to the call' of an unseen trumpeter

Of hearing the distant voice of an invisible coach

Of not riding roughshod over competitors, of joining the 'dog eat dog' business practice

Of becoming strange to the cheating, lying, 'mine if I can get away with it' attitude of former mates

Of being strange in not enjoying a fruity but dirty joke, of drinking yourself senseless 'under the table'

Strangely different – of knowing when to stop, and how to say NO to the tempter

A '**pilgrim**' - *dictionary* – a journey, a trip, a voyage, by a traveler

The whole essence of the meaning seems that of "passing through" - of not being able to settle down, of not being able to take up

"permanent residence", but instead being able to arise at a moments notice and continue on to another area. Virtually to live with your bags packed and ready to move on.

The concept quite stunned me – and forced a review of my chosen career of constructing buildings of as permanent materials and design as possible

A '**sojourner**' - *dictionary* – sojourn - a stopover, a temporary stay, a visit, to tarry for a while.

My mind went back to consider Jesus the Son of God come to earth - having been raised in a house with his father Joseph a carpenter, he must have learned the same carpentry skills, yet he never went on to construct a single solitary religious building,

Indeed, his world view was expressed as '*my Kingdom is not of this world*'

His words were all about 'the Kingdom of Heaven' come to earth

He laboured as one who had but a short time to fulfill his mission – 3 short years in actual fact.

No earthly shrine did he construct, no Church building to be revered, idolized and maintained.

And Paul, though his trade was that of a tentmaker – yet he never started his own tent making business, he never tried to franchise his craft, or establish a Tent industry to keep his brethren employed !

And so a tug of war started within me, which continues to some variable degree to this very day - I had to earn a living, to provide for my wife and family that God definitely brought into being, while seeking to follow the inward call of the Master.

And then, another verse was quickened to me - *Matthew 6 : 33 Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all these things shall be added unto you*

It burnt into my very fibre, and added to the mental tug of war that was being waged within.

Where was the balance of life and my energies to be found, what was to be my focus and goal, what were to become my priorities ?

The answer was all too clear and apparent.

I glanced sideways at the Christian Church, and the big denominations, - at their building programmes, from lavish Cathedrals to local assembly halls, their property portfolios, their budgets, their self appointed titles, robes, and all the ritualistic trappings and fanfare to try to convey the message of the lowly itinerant Nazarene son of a carpenter.

How have they missed it all, where did the notion of being a pilgrim, of being a stranger in the earth, of being on a sojourn, a stopover, get pushed to one side or submerged ?

I recall being told that the second best selling book (after the Bible) on this planet, of a past era, was called "Pilgrims Progress" by John Bunyan, and it strongly and powerfully conveyed this concept and message to his generation.

How could they fall for settling down in the one spot, of empire building (but for the Lord supposedly) of constructing worldly monuments while supposedly following the voice of the Shepherd, I mused..

How did the religious world get so sidetracked ? -- how did the erection of temporal buildings and the establishment of denominations override the Masters clear message and example.

Perhaps it all really started to decline with Constantine in 323 AD, – who undoubtedly thought that he was doing Christians and the world a big favour by building so many Churches, when in all probability he derailed the simple lifestyle of the early Christians by getting them to focus on buildings, (and their costly maintenance) and the numbers game of counting congregation size, and budgets, and programmes, and performances, and frequent attendances. and dressing up in the Sunday best in case he looked in !

My mind turned to the classic Chapter on Faith - *Hebrews 11*

Abraham seemed to get the concept

v.9 By faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country

v.10 For he looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker (architect and builder) is God

Moses also had the idea

v.24 By faith Moses, when he as come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward,

v.27 By faith he forsook Egypt

And the other patriarchs and heroes of faith likewise

v.13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. v.14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek such a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from where they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city

The building work of Heaven has already been done !!
How was a budding earthly Architect to view this concept

13:14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come

Paul summed it up nicely

For our citizenship is in heaven, from where also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ
Phillipians 3:20

We are repeatedly warned not to become entrenched in the worlds system of acquiring possessions, of relying on programmes, on establishing a religious haven down here

Whatever “things” we possess are to be held lightly, not clung to, nor allowed to be dominated by.

We are to be wary of established and settled denominations and assemblies, no matter how charismatic or appealing they may appear.

Jesus - an itinerant preacher / healer, with no permanent residence or place ‘to lay his head’, erecting no edifice, having only 12 close followers, leaving no visible evidence of his having been on earth, and yet our history is divided by his life - our calendar dates from his birth, with millions of lives affected by his touch, words and influence.

And he’s coming back ! He promised to return ! Maybe soon !!

Lord – keep me as a stranger in the world, as a pilgrim and a traveler through, following only your personal leading, until my short sojourn here is over.

Amen, and Amen

identity

18

Who am I ? 3 very important words, making a vital question
The answer to which greatly affects our lives, our choices, and our very destiny !

Who am I ?
I have asked myself frequently, and considered long and hard.

Well to various people in my sphere of influence I am different things
To my wife I am a husband, to my children a father, to my relatives a grandfather, a brother, an Uncle, a cousin, and so on.
And I am also a neighbour, Architect, professional consultant, employer, colleague, friend, confidant, sportsman, etc etc
To the local Council I am a ratepayer, to the Inland Revenue - a taxpayer. The list goes on according to my role in life

Well that's OK for my natural family and circumstances

And how I am viewed by my contemporaries ?
They look at me by another set of identity criteria altogether – what suburb I live in, even which street my house is in, who designed my house, its size and vintage, what car I drive – its make and newness, what clubs or organizations that I belong to, how I dress, my clothing labels, where I shop, what school my kids attend, the social status of my friends, my racial ethnicity, the periodicals that I subscribe to, even my hair stylist, - the process of identification goes on endlessly. All of these outward appearances are used to identify me, and to type cast me

But a more important identity is unseen but absolutely vital to all of us - within our spiritual, emotional, mental inner self – within our soul / spirit

As a Christian, 'born from above' by the Spirit of God Himself, renewed, transformed, I have another identity, just as real - if not more so - than my natural identity.

Here, within my inner self, I am indeed another person, in Christ

**Redeemed, Purchased, Bought with a price, Forgiven,
Cleansed,
Called with a Holy calling, Chosen, Sanctified,
a Brother / sister In Christ, one of the Brethren,
a member of the Body of Christ
a Fellow Pilgrim,
Salt of the Earth, Light of the World,
an Overcomer, a more than Conqueror
a King & Priest to our God,
a follower of the Way,
a servant of the Lamb
a child of the Most High GOD,
a child of FAITH, born from above,
a possessor of a Blessed Hope, and Eternal Life,
a witness to those around,
an ambassador for Christ Himself,**

With a role to play in Life, and an individual and personal calling
Wow

And looking within the Book of Books itself, I found likewise

Jesus, who knew what he was, and stated it

***The Way, the Truth, the Life
The Light of the world
The Bread of life
The Door into the sheepfold
The resurrection and the life
The true vine (and God as the Gardener)
The good shepherd
etc etc***

And who on His last night on earth demonstrated it further

***Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands,
and that he was come from God, and went to God,, arose from
supper, and took of his jacket, and used a towel as an apron. After
that he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples
feet, and to wipe them with the towel he had used as an apron***

John 13 : 2 – 5

(The washing of the dusty feet of travellers and visitors was the menial function of a house slave or servant, definitely not the role of a guest) Jesus knew who he was in God, and for that reason he could perform such a humble function – no task was too menial, no humiliation an embarrassment.

He knew where he had come from, what he was on earth for, his calling in God, and where he was going to, and so he could ***made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant***

Our example *Phillipians 3 : 7*

And that is the key to servant-hood – being secure within ones innermost being, knowing who we are in Christ, knowing that no humiliation, or circumstance, or act of contrition, or put down, can affect our self esteem, our estimation of ourselves, our position as a redeemed child of God.

Only the spiritually secure in themselves can perform true acts of servant-hood. Otherwise we are back into the gospel of good works for works sake to somehow try to earn brownie points and Gods favour – legalism again.

And **Moses**, who ***refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season***

Hebrews 11 : 25

Only by knowing his calling and being absolutely secure in himself could he choose a path of affliction and servant-hood rather than all of the rank, riches and repartee of Egypt.

And what about **John the Baptist** – the man of whom Jesus said ***among those that are born of woman, there is not a greater prophet***

Luke 7 : 28

He knew his identity and calling ***"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness"*** *Matthew 3 : 3* As one living in the wilderness, clothed in animal skins, eating a natural diet of insects and honey, he had none of the usual natural identity criteria to be measured by, but what a man, what a calling – none like it before or since. He absolutely knew who he was in God, and that mightily affected his choice of lifestyle and all that went with it, eventually being executed in Herod's prison.

Likewise the Apostles and the disciples of Jesus :

James spokesman of the Apostles Council Acts 15 : 13 a pillar of the Church Galatians 2 : 9, yet just simply known and referred to himself as **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ** James 1 : 1

Peter by revelation Peter knew who Jesus was **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God** Matthew 16 : 16

Whereupon Jesus told Peter of his identity, **You are Petros** – a little rock, and then proceeded to personally foretell Peter of his role and calling in life (But a few verses later, Peter had temporarily forgotten all this and tried to talk Jesus out of his role as the sacrificial lamb of God) Later Peter called himself **a servant and an Apostle of Jesus** 2 Peter 1:1 **and an elder and a witness, and also a partaker of the glory** in a true estimation of himself 1 Peter 5 : 1

Paul knew who he was in Christ, continually referring to himself in his introductions in his letters to the various local Churches / Epistles as an Apostle by calling.

He was **a Hebrew, an Israelite, from the lineage of Abraham** 2 Corinthians 11 :22 as far as his natural heritage and worldly classification.

His enemies knew him as **a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes** Acts 24 : 5

But Paul knew himself **as a Minister of Christ, I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, frequently imprisoned, often in peril**

Then he lists his hardships – **5 times receiving 39 stripes, 3 times beaten with rods, once stoned, (and dragged out for dead) shipwrecked and then in the ocean for a day and a night, making many dangerous journeys, encountering frequent dangers of rivers, robbers, unbelievers, cities, wilderness, voyages, false brethren, weariness and pain, hunger and thirst, fastings, cold and nakedness, plus the care for the welfare of all Churches**

The only way that a person could survive such a series of hardships and terrible experiences in a good spirit and displaying grace the while, is by knowing absolutely his identity in Christ and being absolutely certain and convinced about his calling in God.

And note that he didn't list his accomplishments, or how many converts he had made, or the number of churches he had started, or the number

of people that were at his last gathering. How unlike many professional ministers of our time. Instead he was very careful to glory only in the cross of his Lord and Christ and the things he had suffered, and his infirmities – *Galatians 6 : 14, 2 Corinthians 12: 9 - 11*

And time would fail me to tell of other heroes of faith and servant-hood – the patriarchs, the many prophets, the countless martyrs, from Genesis down through the ages to the present time, all secure in themselves and their relationship with God

So for us. To know our identity in Christ is the only sure way to be able survive the many mountain-top and valley experiences of life and yet keep displaying the character and grace of Christ the while, and display the true nature of a servant heart

Who am I ?

Knowing and remembering the answer to this most vital question is the single most important thing that will carry us through whatever life can throw at us, be it promotion or humiliation, praise or blame, plenty or poverty, success or failure, health or sickness, support or solitude.

As with Jesus, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, Moses, and the untold numbers of Christian martyrs down through the ages, so with us.

Know our true identity, remember it, our whole life and its living depends on it !

our names, our identity who we are in CHRIST 19

**greetings to all those fellow believers
who are**

**Brothers In Christ, Brethren
Fellow Pilgrims,
Salt of the Earth,
Lights of the World,
Redeemed, Purchased, Bought with a price, Forgiven,
Cleansed,
Called with a Holy calling, Chosen, Sanctified,
Overcomers, Conquerors,
Kings & Priests to our God,
Followers of the Way, The Lamb
Children of the Most High GOD,
Children of FAITH, Born from above,
Possessors of a Blessed Hope, & Eternal Life,
Witnesses to those around,
Ambassadors for Christ,
Sometimes despised & scorned, disregarded, rejected
..... (so what !)
Fellow sufferers with Him, following in His steps
Spirit filled & Endowed, Fruit bearing, Anointed,
Forward looking, Past forgetting,

H I S & only H I S till Eternity comes**

That's WHO / WHAT we are in Him

That's Y O U and M E !!

A school motto observed

Know yourself, and to your own self be true

security

20

It was in the newspaper recently !

There was a clip about a wealthy person in the USA, who didn't feel at all good about himself, who got quite worried, if he didn't have \$100 million available cash reserves that he could draw on if needed !! Well, each to his own level of resources.

In these troubled times, and as people get older, so the need for a feeling of physical security seems to grow along with the passing of years. Hence the proliferation of "gated villages" and retirement conclaves.

Physical security is a major factor for the elderly especially widows and their accommodation.

Particularly in certain parts of big cities, and isolated rural areas.

And what about financial security and the worries that can bring ??

Security certainly is a major source of human concern, especially among the disadvantaged, the young, the vulnerable and the elderly.

The need to feel secure would have to be a basic human need, in the same category as that of being loved, appreciated, and of value and worth.

The grouping of these personal psychological needs is undoubtedly the reason that teenagers hang around in groups, that gangs are formed, that clubs proliferate of every type and variety – and may I say it - that Churches attract and hold many followers

The need to feel secure can be enhanced in an assembly of basically like-minded nice clean-living people.

But a born again Christian has a far deeper and truer security - the everlasting arms of the Creator / Saviour.

And that should be sufficient – along with all the many promises of care and security that go with the Lordship of Jesus Christ , and the personal indwelling and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Our lifeline to security is faith in an utterly all-sufficient, all powerful, all knowing ... God

In Him our individuality is endorsed, and fulfilled – we are complete in Him alone

We are *accepted in the beloved*, and secure in his total saving and sustaining grace

But the attraction of an earthly established religious assembly of fellow believers brings satisfaction to our need for physical security, appreciation, even elevation and prominence, and ultimately even financial reward. The local Church system of religion can feel like a very secure swimming pool indeed.

But there is always a down-side.

The other side of the coin is a yielding up of our own uniqueness, our individual hearing of “the Masters voice”, our absolute dependency on God himself.

The personal guidance of the Holy Spirit can be dominated by the weekly sermon topic, the personal views of the minister, the current Church programme, the doctrinal statement of that group, the decisions of the elders, the prejudices of the home group leader, or often the inclinations and preferences of the ministers wife !

The Church system and its programmes and activities can slowly and insidiously become ones “guiding star” and security base.

And such people wonder why they aren’t experiencing personal guidance and the excitement of a vibrant Christian experience, why they aren’t moving in their own particular giftings. When these have been submerged to meet the need for a feeling of security - albeit with monotony, and conformity, in what proves to be a very shallow swimming pool indeed

The need for a feeling and sense of “security” is purely a natural one - not spiritual in any degree what so ever.

A born-again Christian’s security is in the finished work of Calvary and in God Himself alone - ask John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Nelson Mandela, God’s smuggler, a persecuted

underground believer, or most any vibrant radiant joyous Christian you can find.

Now, that's not against fellowship, support and encouragement from other Christians in the Body of Christ, either by individuals or groups, which we all need and appreciate.

But the source of our security is quite a different thing entirely

Secure naturally within a local Church system ?,

Or, secure eternally in the finished work of Calvary and the arms of an all powerful loving and watchful Father / God ??

There's truly a universe of difference

Beware any other feeling of security and trust than in God Himself

Beware of all counterfeits, no matter how charming they appear

**He that dwells in the secret place of the most High shall abide
under the shadow of the Almighty
I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in
Him will I trust
Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from
the noisome pestilence
He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings shall you
trust. His truth shall be your shield and buckler
You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor for the arrow that
flies by day
Nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor for the
destruction that wastes at noon-day
A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right
hand, but it shall not come nigh you
Only with your eyes shall you behold and see the reward of the
wicked
Because you have made the Lord, which is my refuge (security)
even the most High, your habitation (dwelling place)
There shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come nigh
your dwelling.
For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all
your ways.
They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot
against a stone.
You shall tread upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the
dragon shall you trample under foot.
Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him, I
will set him on high, because he has known my name
He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in
trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.
With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation**

Psalm 91

Wow indeed !!

epilogue

21

Is all of this 'too negative', I hear someone say.

From a child I observed people who portrayed one thing on Sunday at Church and quite another thing during the remainder of the week.

This bothered me much, and I grew up with a deep abhorrence for hypocrisy, especially religious hypocrisy.

Then at 21, I met a man and his family where this was not so, whose lifestyle was consistent.

He took me to a Church which was quite alive (at that stage), where I had a true born-again experience that changed the direction of my life for ever.

The Bible became alive to me, I could understand it for the first time.

But one of the very first things I realised as I read it and sought God, was the vast and colossal difference between Religion and Christianity.

They are really 'poles apart' Many people if not most, see them as one intertwined 'bird's nest' and so often reject both together.

My earlier observances of religious hypocrisy then came into sharp focus, and I realised why Jesus had so much trouble with the Scribes and Pharisees and the religious establishment of his time. His words were unsparing of their feelings as He rebuked them - just read *Matthew 23 Hypocrites, fools and blind* he accused them and rebuked them publicly

One of his very first actions in his public ministry, and one of the last also, was to enter the temple and take the time and trouble to make a whip and physically drive the traders and money changers out of the temple John 2 : 14 - 17 (The people of that time had obviously become conditioned to the actions of the temple traders and money changers) Jesus displayed true righteous indignation, and portrays exactly how God feels towards religion, religious theft, and religious hypocrisy

My house shall be called the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves Jesus said *Matthew 21 : 13*

As an Architect, I frequently get asked to design a new building on a site that has an old previous structure still standing. The very first thing that we have to do is - demolish the old building, including its foundations, and clear the site.

Then, and only then, can a Builder start afresh to construct a new building.

Even the old foundations must be ripped up - they just will not support a new building, and it would be foolish and dangerous to consider doing so - just ask an Engineer

Or ask a farmer. A spoiled crop should be ploughed in, the fallow ground tilled, the ground then disced, harrowed, raked, well prepared before a new crop can be planted.

Or ask a carpenter. In restoration work -strip of the old finish, fill the holes and cracks, and start all over again.

And so it is with the system of the institutionalised Religion - the old decaying structure including its foundations must needs be demolished, ripped up, and taken to the tip, or used as land-fill on some other site.

But, the trouble is, that we in the Western culture, have been so conditioned to denominationalism, traditionalism, legalism, performance orientated institutionalised Churchianity, tithing, paid professional clergy, and all the other trappings of religion, that some view any words of insight or demolition as negative.

But the site must be cleared before a new building of simplicity, grace, reality and beauty can be built to the Masters original design. First the negative, then the positive.

God said to Jeremiah so succinctly in *Jeremiah 1 : 10*

'See, I have set you against the nations and the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and (only when this has been done) to build, and to plant'

And Jesus said it supremely in *Luke 5 : 37, 38* *'No man puts new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled,*

and the bottles shall perish. New wine must be poured into new bottles and both are preserved.

So, lets crank up the bulldozer, and give the old tired legalistic Religious structures a good shove

Let's demolish the old decrepit structures, so that we can build the new to God's glory, not man's.

After all**sacred Cows make good hamburgers !!**

John the Baptist was a voice with a ONE word message ...

REPENT

As I consider the many dear people who for one reason or another have left the structured Church scene, who have exited the Present Religious System, (or who may even have been asked to leave), or have tired of a controlling authoritarian system that stifles, with what ever degree of personal trauma and bruises that accompanied the process - I wonder ! Not many that we know of or meet along the way, seem to go on to what I see as 'the next step' Many seem to wander on with a degree of open eyes and sight !

They have seen enough to exit the present religious system, or at least to get one leg out of the quicksand, yet do not have whatever it takes to continue on into unknown territory and find what I believe is the true and simple Christian experience ... that of relating to a small group of like minded believers.

The transition stage of recovery seems to be too much for many, and they seem to experience varying scenarios.

Some find attendance at another but free-er assembly / denomination where they can tick over albeit with antennas operating for any static, where they may even find a role of prominence, even eldership, or occasional times of ministry.

Others seem wary of structured religion in whatever guise or with whatever name tag, and withdraw from any active involvement. It can take time to recover from bruising and trauma, and getting ones 'head unscrambled' And so the years can slip by, but without much meaningful Christian association, fellowship or friendship.

I suppose that there are as many responses and reactions as there are individuals.

But personally, I believe that God has 'opened our eyes' as it were, to the pervading religious system, for a purpose.

Not to tentatively return to a milder yet similar system of religion as we had experienced, and not to wander on our own for ever.

But to learn from our experiences and seek a small local group of like minded believers where we can find truer relationships and share in what God is doing locally wherever, whatever, however.

To see clearly with both eyes wide open, to find a simple and true but small group of people that we can relate with, and share and care in reality

So, where to from here ? is now my delight and my unsatisfied satisfaction !

To 'walk on water' first - you gotta get out of the boat

To the angel of the Church in Laodicea write :

these are the true words of the Amen, the faithful, and true witness, the ruler of Gods creation :

I know that your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.

I wish that you were either one or the other !

So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold -

I will spit (vomit) you out of my mouth.

You say ‘ I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing’

But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich, and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness, and ointment to put on your eyes, so that you can see.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.

So be earnest and repent.

Here I am ! I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him , and he with me.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches

Revelation 3 : 14 – 22 NIV

But rise, and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto you. Delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send you To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me

Jesus to Paul on the road to Damascus

Acts 26 : 16 - 18

The New Testament prophet is not necessarily a fore-teller, but rather a forth-teller