

Falling Away from the Simple Faith

By George Davis and Michael Clark

PART 1

Paul knew that this would be his last trip to Jerusalem. He was in Ephesus, and he called the elders, those who walked out Christ as an example to the Ephesian Ecclesia. With tear filled eyes he explained that he would never see their faces again. He had no regrets, for he had faithfully declared the gospel to all, was innocent of the blood of all men, and had not coveted after any man's possessions.

However, there was one burden that Paul could not shake, something the Lord had shown him only three years before. For three years now, he had warned everyone with tears "night and day." What was it that would bring such a man to tears, a man who had been beaten, shipwrecked, stoned and left for dead? A man who had been whipped several times with the dreaded forty lashes save one, with which our Lord also had been beaten just before He was crucified? What had he seen that troubled him so? He had witnessed the perversion of something he had invested his life for. Paul had foreseen the falling away of the *Ekklesia*. It had disturbed him so much that he did not cease to warn every Christian he met. (Acts 20:31, 2 Thessalonians 2:5)

Clearly, this was Paul's primary concern as his departure from earth approached. Surely something as pressing as this can be found elsewhere in his epistles. As we shall see, Paul's passion to warn the church about the coming apostasy was second only to the declaration of the gospel. Paul revealed to the Ephesian elders the beginnings of this apostasy. We also see this has been the same throughout recorded history. Every falling short of the fullness of Christ--whether it be Satan's, man's or that of the Church--all had the same mysterious beginnings, and likewise suffered the same perversion.

The Beginnings Of Apostasy

Let's listen in on Paul's parting comments as he warned the Ephesian elders regarding the future of the Christian community.

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20: 29-30)

"From among yourselves men will rise up"

Paul was painting a verbal picture here by using two Greek words, a preposition implying origin and a verb revealing movement toward a particular destination. These two Greek words are represented in the text by the words "from" and "rise."

"from" (Greek *ek*--a primary preposition denoting origin. "Out from")

"Also from among yourselves " men will "rise" (Greek *anistemi*--rise up, stand forth, to rise up against any one.)

"Speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves."

The word that was translated "perverse" in the Greek is *diastripho*. It literally means to oppose and plot against the saving purposes of God. These men not only covet the flock of Christ as their own, but also pervert and oppose the gospel of Christ.

Here we see the beginnings of apostasy in the Church. "Savage wolves," Paul warned, would "come out . . . and rise up." Does this sound familiar? It should, for these wolves fulfill the condition for the fall. Strong's Concordance goes on to define this word *anistemi* as those who are "kings, prophets, priests, leaders of insurgents and of those about to enter into conversation or dispute with anyone, or to undertake some business, or attempt something against others." These wolves would enter into the age-old satanic tradition of exalting themselves, resulting in the same perversion. When we speak of the term "fall" we are referring to a cyclical law of cause and effect, condition and result that is as consistent and sure as the law of gravity. Certain conditions will always bring the same results. In simplest terms, this law can be reduced to these few words.

Pride [goes] before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18 NKJV)

Pride is the act of coming out of our God-intended state and exalting ourselves. In coming out (*ek*) and rising up (*anistemi*) we meet the resistance of heaven, and qualify as the enemy of God. Let us take a closer look at the origin of this mystery, which Paul referred to as "the mystery of iniquity" in 2 Thessalonians. 2:7.

The Fall of Satan

Isaiah gave us the most complete picture of the first falling away when he wrote:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart,
I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:
I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will be like the most High.
Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isaiah 14: 13-15)

Here we see the cycle of apostasy. First the cause:

1. Coming out of--satan came out of his God-intended role as the "cherubim the covereth," casting his eyes upward.
2. He exalted himself, leading away one third of the hosts of heaven as his following. In a sense he lead away disciples after himself and took those once free angelic beings and made them captives to him.
3. There was a war in heaven, as satan opposed God in order to exalt himself.
4. Then the effect: The fall--satan was "brought down." By divine law, he who exalts himself shall be humbled.

The Fall of Man

In Genesis chapter three, we see Eve being tempted by the cunning "serpent" to fall for the same delusion. Satan tempted her to come out of her God-intended state and exalt herself as God.

"For God knows," said the serpent, "that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5 NKJV.) Eve succumbed to this age-old lie, "The Lie" which had found its beginning as a whisper in the heart of the Lucifer himself.

The Lie was used to entice Eve in the garden. Her complicity led to the same consequences that befell Satan after his egotistical insurrection. Satan was cast out of the heavens; Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden for believing and participating in the same lie. This mystery of iniquity that originated in the heart of the "cherubim that covereth" had found its way into the hearts of man, God's most precious creature, who He had created in His own image and likeness. Satan had succeeded in his most heinous plot by infecting this most beloved creation with a spirit of enmity against its creator. This enmity so thoroughly corrupted God's creation that in time He came to wish that He had never created man. Our enemy takes great joy in perverting man, the image of God, and His greatest pleasure is to get man to pervert and destroy his fellow man. Thus Eve's first act after her fall was to tempt Adam.

Satan knew if he could entice man with the same lie, man's complicity would have the same results. And so it was that all God's creation was permeated with this cause and effect called sin, a treacherous and egotistical bent toward self-exaltation and self-preservation. We see the same cycle in the fall of man as in the fall of Satan, both initiated by a belief in the same lie, and resulting in the same perversion. Man identified with Satan and took on the nature of his perversion, a perversion expressing itself in an inexplicable desire to rule over others, to be like God, and to usurp His throne. "I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation. . . I will exalt my throne above the stars of God [His servants]."

The Fall of the Church

Jesus said: Don't ever let anyone call you "Rabbi," for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters. And don't address anyone here on earth as "Father," for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father. And don't let anyone call you "Master," for there is only one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Matthew 23:8-12 NLT)

On the backdrop of the hierarchic system of the Pharisees, Jesus was revealing what should be considered normal in the Christian community. He was setting forth the true and God-appointed normal condition for the believer. For those who were not content to abide on the same level as brothers and sisters, but exalt themselves through titles of distinction that imply rank, He gave an ancient warning, "those who exalt themselves will be humbled." For the one who exalts himself above the same level brotherhood is coming out to rise in the very spirit and character of Lucifer himself. With this warning from our Lord in mind, let us review a few historic events, which led to the degrading of the true Church and the progressive emergence of the anti-church in its current form.

The Rise of the Apostate Church

Some time in the third century a fly got in the ointment. A chap named Gregory, later known as Gregory the Worker of Wonders, got saved. He proved to be quite influential in his native Pontus, "converting" almost everyone there to Christianity. It is doubtful that he preached the gospel of the kingdom, because he found it necessary to make the transition from paganism to Christianity easier by substituting festivals honoring Christian saints for the old feasts to the pagan gods. Somehow I can't picture the apostles being pleased with feasts giving them honor instead of all glory going to their beloved Jesus.

Later on in Armenia one Gregory the Illuminator, a member of the Armenian aristocracy, got on the Christian bandwagon and decided to propagate his new faith by converting the king. With the help of his nobles, good king Tiridates got the whole population to swing into line. Soon many pagan shrines and temples were converted to Christian use and many pagan priests were out of a job. Not to worry; the good king had a rehabilitation program. He made these heathen priests and their sons into Christian priests and bishops and everybody was happy. The Church now had fancy shrines to meet in instead of the humble homes of the common man that were so familiar until then. The pagan priests were still in a position of power, leading the church instead of those humble servants of Christ. "Insto chango," everybody is a Christian, so let's party!

This worked so well in Armenia, other monarchs saw a way to ease the tension this new faith out of Judea was putting on the Roman system. Enter the great Constantine. Many Roman Emperors heavily persecuted the Christians in the first three centuries and the Church flourished and grew rapidly. After the last ditch efforts of Diocletian to wipe out the Church by force, Satan had to come up with a new idea. He found a willing adherent

to this new plan in the emperor Constantine. The story of how this monarch became a "Christian" is quite involved, but the upshot was a new age of tolerance toward both Christians and pagans. This worked well for him; Constantine maintained his title of "pontifex maximus." He was still the chief priest of the pagan state cult and retained his position as the official Roman god as well as taking control of the Church. He also took to himself the title of "The Thirteenth Apostle," becoming in effect the first pope.

Under him the Church clergy gained a tax-exempt status that only pagan priests had enjoyed before. Soon there was a flood of rich Romans into the priesthood, taking advantage of this great tax loophole. With all these powerful Romans as leaders, the Church soon gained political power that was only wielded by the Roman government itself up until this time. Soon the "Christian" Sunday and special feast days honoring Christian martyrs were observed along with the pagan holidays. Bishops were given the right to hear and settle lawsuits in their courts. Jews were forbidden to stone Jews who became Christians. Christian clergy and bishops became a regular part of the emperor's court. Next, Constantine started a massive public works program building churches and cathedrals throughout the area for his newfound faith.

He also forbade the repair and construction of pagan temples and Christians were no longer forced to participate in their rituals. Eventually, pagan rituals were totally abolished in Rome and their temples closed. By becoming a Christian, a person could gain official favor of the emperor and even new opportunities for wealth. Anyone who was under the employ of the Roman government was required to be a Christian and to sweeten the pot, Constantine offered a reward of thirteen pieces of gold and a new white garment to anyone who would be baptized into his faith. As you can imagine, the lines were long.

Paganism never was totally wiped out. Many pagan holidays were incorporated into Christian holidays. Pagan priests found their place in this new religion, and they brought their idolatrous ways in with them, instituting Christian ritual. Satan had won a great victory. He drew in his train not only a third of the hosts of heaven, but the very bride of Christ. Authority delegated by the Emperor himself to this new priesthood all but replaced God's spirit-led authority in His precious bride.

Paul's Warnings to the Church

Now, we would like to harmonize a few of the instances where Paul warned the individual churches regarding the apostasy soon to follow.

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:29-30, NKJV)
Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes

first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself to be God.

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness [iniquity] is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-11, NKJV)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:1-3, NKJV).

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:1-5, NKJV).

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers (2 Timothy 4:1-3 NKJV)

According to scripture, these are the last days. However, it must be noted that the days when Peter and Paul walked the earth were also the last days. The author of the book of Hebrews wrote, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. . ." (Hebrews 1:1-2 NKJV). According to Joel, the Holy Spirit would be poured out in the "last days." It is evident that those who witnessed the Spirit's outpouring on the day of Pentecost were living in the last days. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh. . ." (Acts 2:17, NKJV).

Accordingly, when Paul warned the Church that in the last days perilous times would come, he was speaking of any time from then till now. Paul told the Ephesian elders that from among themselves men would rise up, indicating that Paul knew the apostasy would begin in their lifetime. Why would Paul tell them to "watch therefore" if there was nothing for them to see? (Acts 20:30) He warned them of what was to come immediately after his departure. (Acts 20: 29) Many believe that there will be a falling away, yet future, and view those who depart from their ranks as apostate. On the contrary, the falling away has already happened, and there is an ongoing move of God's Spirit to restore what was lost. For it to be otherwise the church would have had to remain pure down through the years, and that would require a total rewriting of history. No, history attests to a radical departure from the faith. If not, why the Reformation? Why fix it if it ain't broke?

There was without doubt a great departure from the faith. Moreover, from among the very leadership of the first century church savage wolves did rise up, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. In their refusal to endure sound doctrine, and having itching ears, they heaped up for themselves teachers. They were indeed giving heed to seducing spirits, doctrines of devils, and teachings according to the working of Satan. This teaching in principle and practice leads to the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. Accordingly, perilous times would come because men would become lovers of their own selves, men of vainglory, promoting themselves. (Philippians 2:3)

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory," said Paul. He went on to contrast the love of self to the mind of Christ saying, "Let this mind be in you." What mind? The very mind of humility and servanthood, the mind of the Servant whose crowning act was to lay down His life for all on the cross. This is the Spirit of Christ. This is the mind of Christ. This is sound doctrine--the truth that was not loved, resulting in God sending strong delusions that they should believe The Lie.

Rather than going down the pathway of the cross, the wolves have ascended, exalting their thrones above all that is called God. This is a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof---the power of the cross. This is the mystery of iniquity that Paul said "is already at work," a mystery which opposes the lamb and exalts savage wolves.

The term "falling away" in Second Thessalonians chapter two, verse three, implies that those falling away were Christians. What would a sinner fall away from? It is a falling that reveals the "son of perdition" who "opposes and exalts himself."

"opposes" [480] *antikeimai* an-tik'-i-mahee- to be set over against, opposite to, to be contrary to.

Clearly the opposite, the anti-type of Christ would be revealed in the apostasy. As the body of Christ is to personify the nature and character of Christ, so the antichrist-system would take on the likeness of the son of perdition who is in every regard the opposite of Christ and the true *Ekklesia*. This is why the apostate church also takes on the self-exalting nature of Satan, who first said, "I will exalt my throne." This is evidenced by

those wolves who (*ek*) come out of the Christian community, to rise above the same level brotherhood, to exalt their thrones over the mount of the congregation. Paul understood the apostasy of the Church in the context of this ancient mystery, the mystery of iniquity. Furthermore he saw its root cause as directly related to The Lie.

This apostasy is the fruit of man's denial of Christ's servanthood and humility as a way of life. And in refusing this "they received not the love of the truth..." and were given over to the opposing spirit of antichrist. Those refusing to obey Christ's example were sent strong delusions that they might believe The Lie that is the opposite of Christ's example. (vs.11) All who do not come in humility and servanthood, as modeled by Christ and birthed by the Spirit of Christ, are at best deeply affected with the opposite spirit of the antichrist. Consider these comparisons:

Christ	Antichrist Wolves
Humbled Himself	Exalt themselves (rise up)
Took on the form of a servant	Take on the form of kings
Became obedient unto death	Lawless and self-preserving
Bearing the cross	Seeking the crown

The word *antichrist* means *against Christ, opposite of Christ, or in place of Christ*. It is interesting that the apostasy is characterized by all of the above. The wolves that rose up were indeed the opposite of Christ in their examples. They were unwitting participants in a conspiracy against Christ, and eventually did replace Christ. They mediated between Christ and the believer, even to the point that their ears were required for the confession of sin. Before long the believer was relegated to a purely vicarious relationship to God, leading to the kissing of papal feet and rings. Eventually the chief wolf was declared infallible. The scriptures were totally disregarded, and declared secondary to the word of the "faultless one."

The group known as "The Protestants" saw through the abuses of power and the paganism of this idolatrous antichrist system. Accordingly, followers of Luther destroyed every image in Germany, angrily smashing them with iconoclastic zeal. In Protestant circles, you rarely find an image of Mary, Peter or any of the statues that had been worshipped and prayed to, for it is easy to see idolatry on this purely external level.

We could smash every idol on this planet and be no better off, if the spirit behind the idolatry remains intact. If you trace the images back to their source, you would find it in the exaltation of man. Nimrod was the first man to be deified; in fact, the god Baal was the deified Nimrod. After his death, Nimrod was worshipped as Merodach and then as Marduk, Bel and Baal. It all began with a man who exalted himself, after the order of Satan's insurrection. It was not coincidental that the church that exalted men should follow the same path, worshipping prominent men in the tradition of the exalted and deified Nimrod. There is an evolution that occurs when men exalt themselves; it happens every time, it is a law. Wolves rise up and people heap them to themselves. There is a word that describes this idolatry, which can be found in some of the older dictionaries,

and that word is hierolatriy--the act of exalting and worshipping saints. This is the mystery of iniquity at work; there are two errors at work simultaneously. These are:

1. The Tendency of People to seek Teachers, Lords, Fathers and Masters, any mentor other than the Holy Spirit.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine(teaching), but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers. (2 Timothy 4:1-3 NKJV)

2. The wolves who are more than ready to be heaped-up, exalt themselves to come out of the brotherhood and rise up to rule.

"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse [*diastrepho* dee-as-tref'-o--to turn aside from the right path, to pervert, corrupt to oppose, plot against] things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:30, NKJV). It is important to note here that these wolves would function in the same spirit as the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself.

There is plenty of evidence that this happened on a large scale early in the second century. However, signs of this ancient mystery were already surfacing before the close of the first century. John the beloved wrote:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his evil deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. (3 John 9-10 NKJV)

Listen carefully and you can hear the disgust in the voice of a man who walked with Jesus and witnessed His humility and service. Yes, someone had done it again. A man by the name of Diotrephes stood up to propagate the proud tradition. Yes, Diotrephes was chanting the ancient mantra, the sacred verbal formula--the invocation of gods. "I will ascend, I will exalt my throne, I will sit upon the mount of the congregation, I will be like the most high." It is apparent here that Diotrephes had purposed in his heart to come out of the same level brotherhood and establish his throne. He "loves to have the preeminence," said John, and "neither doth he himself receive the brethren." Moreover, he promptly threw anyone who would receive John and the brothers out of the church. One thing was clearly a threat to the Diotrephenian kingdom, and that was brotherhood.

He did not receive the brethren and quelled the rebellion of his subordinates who would receive them, by exercising his godlike powers in kicking them out of the Ekklesia. Diotrephes is clearly a prototype for the many wolves that would follow his example. And the mystery of all mysteries is that while they took to themselves titles of distinction that elevated them above the rest of the brotherhood, in time, through sophistry, they

convinced their poor browbeaten subjects that they should be paid handsomely for doing so.

This bent toward exalting and worshipping men, even saints, finds its origin in Babylon's first deified king. But more so in the heart of the "Cherubim that covereth" that first chanted the mantra "I will exalt my throne," and who first suffered the consequential fall. Satan knew how it worked; he tried it out on himself before he included humanity through The Lie believed by Eve.

The redemptive work of Christ brought victory over the old Adamic way of life, and created a new creation or humanity, in the "Second Adam." In this new society the fleshly bent toward self-exaltation is illegal, which explains the word lawlessness as related to the mystery of iniquity (mystery of lawlessness). This is the difference between the Spirit of the world and the Spirit of Christ. Anyone that walks in the flesh, the old Adamic nature, is God's enemy.

They walk in another spirit, the spirit of the world. The spirit of Antichrist is antagonistic to and the opposite of Christ in every regard. But we believers are called to "put on Christ," to walk in the Spirit that He walks in, to walk the path of the cross. We must refuse kingship, and humbly decline self-exaltation. The way up is down, and the way down is up.

There has never been a total recovery of what was lost in the fall of the church. There are still men exalted in the ranks, and like folk heroes you can hear their praises sung throughout Christendom. We have smashed all the idols except one--us. "We have found the enemy and he is us." (Pogo). Repentance is in order, a turning away from everything that even remotely resembles hierolatry, and a return to the humility of Christ. Compromise will not do; we have compromised for 1900 years. You cannot wash feet without first discarding the clerical robe, and kneeling wrapped in a servant's towel. Oh please, brother/sister, consider this. We know it is true, and necessary for all that the Lord wants to do at this time.

Where does this leave the professional Clergy? It does not matter whether you have just won the charismatic contest and are the president of the good old boys club. No matter how kind and jovial you may be, if you come out (ek) of the family, the brotherhood, and have, even by popular vote, been exalted above the Ekklesia, no matter how hard you may try to do otherwise, you will become someone's substitute for Christ. They will prefer your counsel to prayer, and your favor over God's. They will stand in that long line of people after your weekly sermon, panting for a pat on the head. They need their weekly affirmation from you because they vicariously live out their so-called "Christian lives" through you. You have replaced Christ in their lives. They are the ones that sing your praises more loudly than Christ's.

And so we see the fall three dimensionally, the fall of Satan, the fall of man, and the fall of the Church, all brought on by the same cause and effect.

"Doctrines of demons"

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. (1 Timothy 4:1 NKJV)

Without doubt the doctrines of demons of First Timothy 4:1 are the same perverse things that Paul said would be spoken by the wolves coming out of the brotherhood to rise up and draw away disciples after themselves. The doctrines of demons referred to here are nothing more than The Lie, "I will exalt my throne, I will be like the most high." Now, knowing the proven effectiveness of this perversion, what would you teach if you were a demon? There is no other lie; there is only The Lie, which is Anti to Christ in every regard. It is impossible to be a part of a hierarchic ecclesiastical system and remain untouched by this spirit, for it was spawned from the spirit of antichrist. In spite of all efforts to the contrary, it will resist the Lord, even to the point that those declaring the precious name of Jesus become Christ's substitutes.

Here are a couple stories as to how our heavenly Father dealt with this idolatry in our individual lives.

One day in 1980 while I was praying and seeking the Lord for direction on what He wanted me to say in my church home meeting, He showed me a vision of myself standing on a pedestal in a white robe with all the people in my home group on their knees around the bottom of the pedestal giving glory to God. As each word of praise went upward to heaven, I reached out and grabbed it and tucked it in my robe next to my heart. After seeing this I cried out, "Oh God! Is this what I am doing to you? Lord, if it is, then kill it!" The gift in me was releasing praises to God, but in my immaturity and desire to be recognized as valid, I had sought to be exalted above others and thereby invalidated the gift He had given me.

When one is truly dead to self and alive to Him, there is no offense taken when your word is rejected and no pride generated when it is received. I know only one way that God can work so great a death in an individual, and that is through tribulation and wilderness. Shortly after I prayed that prayer of death, God started answering it. First He asked me, "Michael, if I cease to move by my Spirit in your meetings, will you try to fake it?" I said, "No Lord, you quit and I quit."

The next day two of the key families in the group called me and told me that they were not coming to the meetings any more. I blessed them and told them that I thought the Lord was telling me that I was to shut it down. The following meeting I announced to the group that it was the last meeting that we would be coming to, but that they were free to continue without us. They had one more meeting and it died." (Michael Clark, an excerpt from "Wilderness--the School of the Prophets")

"Years ago, we had the privilege of introducing a young man to Christ. He was orphaned, and raised by his grandparents. He followed us around like a lost puppy. He looked to us for everything. As God moved us from one location to another, it would not be long

before this young man would pack up his family and move to where we had relocated. This young man looked to me for advice and approval in everything. If he strayed from my perception of God's will for his life, I was always quick to tell him. It was as though we had another child. The only difference was, this child didn't grow up and leave home. He was like Bob in the movie "What about Bob?" He was always there! I must admit that there were times that I questioned whether or not this relationship was healthy, but I felt that I was serving God in helping this dysfunctional young man.

"Then one night I had a dream. It was so real, that I woke confused as to whether or not I had been asleep or awake. In my dream I was sitting on my living room couch. Across the room, in an easy chair, sat this young man. He said nothing, but sat staring, his eyes fastened intently upon me, as if waiting for me to speak. And speak I did. Out of my mouth came these words, "This is a high thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ." It was so real, I could feel my vocal cords vibrating.

Again I said, "This is a high thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ." Over and over again this was repeated, and with each repetition I could feel an increasing sense of physical weakness. "This is a high thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ." As I grew weaker, I began to tip over on the couch, and my vision began to fade in chorus with each repetition. "This is a high thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ." Weaker and weaker I became. My voice began to drag and fade, slower and lower, with each recitation, "This is a high thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ," until finally all was quiet and dark.

I woke in a cold sweat. I needed no interpretation. I knew intuitively what it meant. I had exalted myself against the knowledge of Christ. I was this young man's substitute for Christ. I had retarded his growth in the knowledge of the Son of God. He was dependent upon me, not God. Furthermore, if something were not done, he would never truly know the Lord.

There are many out there in the same precarious position. They have been exalted and are looked to by spiritually dysfunctional people. They have become a vicarious focal point, an idol, and the replacement for a dependent walk with Christ. I did not know that I was a usurper. I had no idea that I was hindering Christ's reign in this young man's life. In fact, I thought I was helping. I beg you, please consider these words. If people are looking to you for strength and help, if you have become anyone's "strong tower," if they prefer your council to prayer, RUN, HIDE, point to Him who is the author and the finisher of our faith. Direct their hearts to the bridegroom. Do such an incredible job of exalting Christ that your name is forgotten, and you will be a true "friend of the bridegroom." Decrease that He might increase. He that hath the Bride, my friend, is the bridegroom. (George Davis, An excerpt from "The Most Sought After Throne")

By Him, of Him, and through Him is all government, and counsel and peace.

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of [His] government and peace [There will be] no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Regarding the tendency to replace Christ with professional clergy Christian Smith wrote,

"The problem is that, regardless of what our theologies tell us about the purpose of clergy, the actual effect of the clergy profession is to make the body of Christ lame. This happens not because clergy intend it (they usually intend the opposite) but because the objective nature of the profession inevitably turns the laity into passive receivers. . .
"THE THIRD PROBLEM with the clergy profession is that it is fundamentally self-defeating. Its stated purpose is to nurture spiritual maturity in the church--a valuable goal. In actuality, however, it accomplishes the opposite by nurturing a permanent dependence of the laity on the clergy. Clergy become to their congregations like parents whose children never grow up, like therapists whose clients never become healed, like teachers whose students never graduate. The existence of a full-time, professional minister makes it too easy for church members not to take responsibility for the on-going life of the church. And why should they? That's the job of the pastor (so the thinking goes). But the result is that the laity remain in a state of passive dependence." ("Church Without Clergy")

Jesus warned that "thieves and robbers" would come in among His flock to kill and destroy them. In John 10 He describes himself the Good Shepherd, who must contend with thieves and robbers in His flock.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

"Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.(John 10:1-8, NKJV).

The Greek word translated "before" in verse eight of John ten is *pro*. It can mean "before" chronologically or "before" positionally (See Acts 5:23). I was told once in a Sunday school class that Jesus is saying, here in John 10, that every Old Testament person whether good king or bad, every false prophet or true, all the patriarchs of Israel, Moses, Noah, Enoch and all of the righteous ones were thieves and robbers because they were ministering before Jesus came. What rubbish! In this verse the word *ever* was added by the translators and the word *came* is *come* in the original. It more correctly should read, "All who come before Me are thieves and robbers."

When a minister uses his gift to place himself in preeminence over the people instead of connecting the people directly to Jesus, he is stealing attention to himself and away from Jesus. He puts himself before Christ. Just like the satanic model, he has become a thief and a robber. Paul told Timothy, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5, NKJV). This displacing of Jesus can happen to a church leader unwittingly. As one brother who was a "pastor" recently wrote:

"I have seen so many well meaning pastors, elders and counselors who are so eager to tell, or give, people the answers to their questions and problems. Even when they are doing a very good job, giving Godly counsel, the result can be making the person dependent on them for help, instead of Jesus. It is harder, but necessary, to train the person to 'look to Jesus.' Of course, a pastor humble enough to do that, probably wouldn't gather much of a following."

Yes, he wouldn't gather much of a following to himself, but might be very instrumental in gathering a following to Jesus.

"Behold I Stand at the Door. . ."

In Revelation chapter three, Christ is pictured as standing outside the Christian community knocking, asking if any hear his voice. Christ had already been replaced. But by what? The mystery of iniquity was already at work, exalting men and replacing Christ. Christ was no longer revered as the teacher; he had been replaced by those with itching ears seeking to heap up teachers to themselves, i.e. wolves who were more than eager to lead away disciples after themselves. Now to the church at Ephesus the Lord had this to say, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Revelation 2: 4)

Many believe this verse does not refer to the leaving and forsaking of the object loved (Jesus), but to the loss of the fervent degree of that first love. However the word left, [863] *aphiemi* (af-ee'-ay-mee), speaks of a departing, not a growing cold. It denotes the "separation of one thing from another," "by which the union or fellowship of the two is destroyed, to go away leaving something behind to leave one by not taking him as a companion." (Thayer and Smith's Bible Dictionary)

This word *left* is used in the context of a husband leaving his wife or vice versa. The leaving of the first love as applied to the Church, likens her to an unfaithful wife. She has abandoned her first lover--the object of that first love. The call to return to the first love represents a call to repent from infidelity. In the same way, Israel, who had gone after other lovers, and was called to return to her rightful husband. "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 3:20). Before the close of the first century, the apostasy was already well underway. We see Jesus, the displaced lover, cast off by His Bride, standing outside the Christian community knocking (Revelation 3:20).

Through history God's means of dealing with the harlotry of His people was to turn them over to their lovers, so that the newfound object of their affections would become their taskmaster. So God sending "strong delusions" is redemptive, just as surely as sending the Jews in Babylonian captivity had a day of deliverance in view. He had a time appointed when He would call them forth to rebuild, and establish His purposes in the earth. In the same way, we see the church flirting with other lovers toward the close of the first century. History attests to the fact that God did send strong delusions, sending this apostate bride into her own Babylonian captivity. I believe that Luther saw this when he referred to the dark days of the papacy as "The Babylonian captivity of the Church." Thus we see the emergence of a mystery woman, a harlot call the "Mystery Babylon," who is the "mother of harlots."

In the mind of God there is a direct and corresponding parallel between the history of Israel who left her husband (God) to peruse other lovers and the history of the apostate church who also left her "first love" for other lovers. The Mystery Babylon is the offspring of the promiscuity of the first century church. She is the apostasy full-blown. She is the love child of a late first century orgy when the church drew to her breast these three lovers, Gnosticism, Romanism, and paganism. Clearly the mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots, is the spawn of this illicit affair.

Just as Israel was called out of Babylonian captivity, a call has gone forth, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." It is the call that was heard by that old fat monk, Martin Luther. It is the call to forsake the apostasy, and return to our first love. It is the call that was heard by Zwingli, Hus, Wycliffe, Calvin, Wesley, Tyndale, and many others, a call perhaps heard by you, and you have not understood it. If you have ever knelt praying, asking the Father why the institution that is called by His name is so unlike Him, so "anti" to Him, reflecting anything but the likeness of Christ, you are not far from hearing the call. He calls to any who can hear His voice, who remembers from where they have fallen (Revelation 2:5) and want to return to their first love.

"Come Out of Her My People"

In Revelation chapters one through three, in the letters to the Churches of Asia Minor, we see the condition of the Church at that time. However, from chapter four on, we see what would happen thereafter.

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. (Revelation 4:1)

They were then "lukewarm" (3:16) "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (3:17) and had left their "first love" (first lover) (2:4). Although they were given a warning, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent," (2:5) they plunged headlong into greater and greater apostasy. The mystery of iniquity was at work enticing the church toward greater and greater perversion. This deviant bent reached its

logical conclusion in the emergence of a mystery woman with these words written on her forehead. "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

Satan, the great counterfeiter, has a copy of God's mystery, the Bride of Christ. As soon as the mystery was revealed to the early Church, he set out to make his own perverted version of the Church, a counterfeit bride, a harlot. As it was with Israel of old, so it is with the apostate church. ". . . She multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot. . ." (Ezekiel 23:19).

John was shown who this counterfeit "bride" was in Revelation 17:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters."

Waters here represent people. This false bride holds down the people that are under her control (See Revelation 17:15).

". . .with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

The terms *fornication*, *whore*, *whoredoms*, and *harlot*, when applied to God's people, almost always refer to their trust and reliance upon neighboring kings rather than God. For instance, Israel made an alliance with Egypt for protection, rather than repent and trust God to defend them against the Babylonian armies. "Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms, to provoke me to anger." (Ezekiel 16:26)

They refused to trust God for divine provision, resorting to the means, methods, principles, values and gods of the kingdoms round about. Metaphorically, in the Old Testament, the word fornication is used to describe the practice of idolatry. Accordingly this mystery woman, like Israel, was not always impure, but represents the apostate church, the Church fallen and defiled, leaving her first lover to sleep with kings.

She had become a seductress. She makes men drunk with her power. She, who was called and betrothed to Jesus, now made her bed with the kings of the earth. For centuries since the time of the Emperor Constantine, the kings of the world have been in league with this seductress in an unholy alliance that has caused the true Church great damage. Out of this alliance has come most of the persecution since 300 AD.

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

She is in league with those who blaspheme the name of Jesus. Satan has his counterfeit woman. Instead of having seven lamp stands before the throne of God, she has seven heads. Where the body of Christ has one head, Jesus, the whore in league with the world's

form of governments has many heads. This signifies that she is divided in leadership. This is the denominational Church in action. The ten horns are the world powers. Just as you have ten fingers and ten toes in your natural body with which you grasp, walk and run, this is the power of carnal man and his government to make war and govern without God (See Revelation 17:18).

The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. (Revelation 17:1-6, NKJV)

It is a marvel to me that she is drunk on the blood of the martyrs, yet her golden cup is filled with abominations and her filthiness. How many saints has she seduced and how many has she killed? Just like Jezebel of old, she will do one or the other.

Why Is She Called "Mystery Babylon"?

She is called Mystery Babylon because she is an amalgamation of Christianity and Nimrod's political and religious system. In fact, God sees Babylon no different in its ending than in its inception, even calling this harlot by her maiden name, Babylon. The kingdom that Nimrod founded, recorded in the book of Genesis, is still around in the book of Revelation. Without doubt, Mystery Babylon is that religious system that was established by savage wolves who rose up, after [according to] the working of Satan (2Thessalonians 2:10), speaking perverse things, doctrines of demons, and The Lie. In the tradition of Satan they resisted and opposed the truth and likeness of Christ, exalting themselves above all that is called God. Unlike the true Church who possessed the nature of the lamb whose strength was found in sacrificial love and self-denial, this counterfeit church took on the likeness and character of Satan, the likeness of wolves.

Nimrod has the distinction of being the first man after the fall to rise after the likeness of Satan's insurrection. He was the first large-scale tyrant, a mighty hunter before the Lord (Genesis 10:9). In refusing to accept the scattering at Babel, Nimrod attempted to hold together something God had confused. In order to do this he had to use military might. Consequently, Nimrod was responsible for many historic firsts.

"Now, this Ninus, or 'Son,' borne in the arms of the Babylonian Madonna, is so described as very clearly to identify him with Nimrod. 'Ninus, king of the Assyrians,' * says Trogu Pompeius, epitomised by Justin, 'first of all changed the contented moderation of the ancient manners, incited by a new passion, the desire of conquest. He was the first who carried on war against his neighbours, and he conquered all nations from Assyria to Lybia, as they were yet unacquainted with the arts of war.'" (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, Chapter II, Section II Sub-Section I "The Child in Assyria")

In the above quotation we see that the King of the Assyrians, Nimrod, "changed the contented moderation of the ancient manners." The dictionary defines the word moderation as "Being within reasonable limits; not excessive or extreme. Not violent or subject to extremes." (American Heritage Dictionary) Nimrod brought a tension to the earth due to his desire of conquest that had not existed prior to his arrival. In his lust for mastery, he ran roughshod over the rights of his neighbors to advance his command. He definitely lived up to his name, which means "rebellion" in Hebrew.

It is important to point out here that before this time, people dwelt as families on the earth. They knew nothing of non-relational leadership. Nimrod brought the dynamic of hell into "the contented moderation of the ancient manners." He brought a dynamic that did not have the well-being of the members of a family in mind, but the pursuit of his own eminence. He imposed a rule other than family. He placed himself above the heads of households, and between the creator and His creation. Thus began the enmity between monarchy, the rule of the dominant creature, as opposed to theocracy, the direct rule of God.

In like manner, Jesus brought the dynamic of family back. He came teaching the kingdom of God, but with one very interesting twist. The King is our Father; we are His children who make up His family. After His resurrection, Jesus sent Mary Magdalene with a message to the disciples saying, ". . . go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John.20: 17) A family was born on Golgotha. Jesus became our Brother and God our Father. It began in the heart of a loving Father who sent His only Son to bring many sons to glory. "Oh what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1).

Satan's plan is to subdue the household of God through the same desire of conquest that animated Nimrod. His plan is to subject the family of God to the influences of people driven by the same desire. He plans to subject the contented moderation of the family of God to the siege of would-be kings. Because the true church is relational, not institutional, it makes sense only in a social context, a family context. Because the true Church is a family, Satan has done all he can to destroy the very concept of family. In our society we can see the breakdown of the family, resulting in every conceivable perversion. Consequently, the victims of this social perversion, living in a dysfunctional world, find it difficult to comprehend the church as a family.

In an attempt to institutionalize the church, all of the dear family terms, such as father, mother, sister, and brother, became officious titles in the papal system. There was father priest, mother superior, sister nun, and brother monk. The hierarchy would not recognize any title without ordination, so all that was once relational and family was misplaced and nearly lost in the institution called The Church. Satan's method of destruction is to pervert, adulterate, and add his own twist to a thing. That is exactly what he did. At this point we suggest that you get up, go to the nearest window, open it, stick your head out, and shout as loudly as you can, "God wants his family back!"

I am convinced that the evangelism of the papal Church was also spawned by this desire for conquest. If the love of Christ had motivated them, fewer people would have been murdered. The goal was to advance at any cost, as long as it cost someone else.

In fact, during the long apostasy of this so-called Church, all the inventions of Nimrod were used to advance its dark, brutal, and exceedingly mercenary campaigns. The belittling of the Church was Satan's master plan, and he did this by taking her hostage through deceit, enticing her to leave her first love and live by the rules and spirit of Babylon. The Mystery Babylon is unmistakably the self-exalting, self-deifying, autocratic, and idolatrous kingdom of Nimrod dressed in clerical robes, trying to pass itself off as the true Church. Should we be surprised when the institutional church, which was born in a compromise with the very idols which originated in Babylon, who themselves are the evolved and deified Nimrod and his wife Semiramis, takes on the likeness and abuses of its ancestors?

When the Church shut out the rule of Christ through human government toward the close of the first century, within four centuries it was swallowed up by the idolatry and leadership style of Babylon. This explains the use of Nimrod's sword of conquest as an evangelical tool. They spread this man-worshipping and man-exalting religion throughout the known world. Every one of the pagan gods in the Greek and Roman pantheon had evolved from the worship of Nimrod and his wife, Semiramis. Of special interest is the fact that Semiramis received the title "queen of heaven," as did the harlot of Revelations 18.

"The Madonna of Rome, then, is just the Madonna of Babylon. (Semiramis) The 'Queen of Heaven' in the one system is the same as the 'Queen of Heaven' in the other." (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*)

When the Church married the Roman government it also married its religions, which all sprang from Babylon. This ancient Babylonian brew was stirred in the caldron of Rome. This age-old Babylonian broth was heated to a boil, and then after adding large quantities of Roman styled government, with just a dash of Christianity, they served up this papal stew to all succeeding generations.

In adapting the very autocratic leadership style of Babylon, which springs from and caters to man's perverted desire to rule, they ruled like their predecessors. This resulted in a cast of super saints organized into hierarchy, with each level being subject to the authority and control of the one above. Talk about a spirit of conquest. Within this system, only the strong survive. Should a leadership style such as this, born in man's identification with Satan in his insurrection against God, and introduced into the Christian community, be declared holy by the very ones sitting over "the mount of the congregation?"

Revelation 18 goes on to shed more light on this mystery woman:

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be

found anymore. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth." (Revelation 18:21-24, NKJV).

Notice that her merchants were the great men of the earth and by their sorceries the nations were deceived. I believe that these sorceries are cleverly woven lies, doctrines of demons that hold men captive in her grasp. This is how she drains the life-blood out of the saints of God. Jesus said that He is the door to the sheepfold and that by Him the sheep come in and go out and find pasture. When I see her merchants at work, I see CONTROL and not freedom.

The Bride of Christ

Revelation 18:4 and 5 says:

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." (Revelation 18:4-5, NKJV).

Now let us take a look at another woman "the bride the Lambs wife" in Revelation chapters 20 and 21.

"And there came unto me one of the seven angels. . . and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. John was then carried away in the spirit to a great and high mountain and there the angel showed him that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It is a city that shone with the glory of God. (vs11) It is a city of pure gold, like unto clear glass. (vs18) And John said, "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." (verse 22)

Here is a major difference between the harlot and the bride. The harlot is consumed with earthly temples. The Bride herself is the temple of the Holy Spirit, but on that final day, God almighty and the Lamb will be our temple. Oh what a glorious day that will be! Not only will God and the Lamb be our temple, but they will also be our light. (verse 23) "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there." (verses 24 and 25)

Once again in stark contrast to the defiled harlot, this bride stands forth as pure and chaste.

"And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth [to be the authors of, the cause of defilement], neither whatsoever worketh abomination [of idols and things

pertaining to idolatry], or maketh a lie [of perverse, impious, deceitful precepts]: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." (verse 27)

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. (Revelation 22:1-4)

Notice that the harlot will bear the name "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" on her forehead, while the bride will bear the name of the Lamb on her forehead. Mystery Babylon models the likeness and self-exalting character of Satan. The Bride, the wife of the Lamb, bears the name of the Lamb, meek and lowly.

Throughout the scriptures name and character are synonymous. It is significant that Jesus is here called the Lamb and that His bride is the Lamb's wife. It is a powerful statement and contrast. Against the backdrop of this brash Harlot, the Lamb displays His chaste and gentle virgin. This harlot's fornication, idolatry, and savagery stand out in stark antithesis to the virgin Bride, pure and white. This is why she is called the Lamb's wife. She is not of the lineage of the savage wolves that sent many of God's people down into the open arms of this whore. The Bride is that company who have come out of her, who have heard the call, ". . . Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." (Matthew 25:6) This is why we answer the call! We must come out of her (Mystery Babylon) if we are ever going to go forth to meet Him (the Bridegroom).

It is more than a call to come out of the apostate harlot church. It is a call to remember from where we have fallen, to return to our rightful lover, to allow the father to clean us up, wash us with pure water, and clothe us in pure white wedding garments. Then He can present us to himself, a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. In Isaiah chapter four verses one and two, we see a picture of our day. Wherein Isaiah said, "And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, "We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; Only let us be called by your name, To take away our reproach." There is depicted by the prophet Isaiah a picture applicable to the Church of our day. Which says "we will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel" as she feeds on the doctrines of men, and clothes herself in her own righteousness--a Church that is His in name only.

But the prophet Isaiah goes on to make a stirring contrast, saying, "In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel." In that day, this very day, The branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, as He who is altogether lovely is manifest. And as He is seen, and we are changed into His likeness, the fruit of it shall be excellent, and comely for them who have escaped unto Him.

Epilogue

There is a move at this time in the heavens. It is the sending forth of a messenger to enlighten the earth.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. (Revelation 18:1, NKJV).

The word *illuminated* above is from the Greek word *photizo*. It means to illuminate or to enlighten, to bring to light and render evident, to spiritually enlighten. I believe that God has sent this angel to enlighten the minds of men that have been darkened by the antichrist spirit of men's religions.

We get many letters each month from dear saints who are excited by our articles and tell us that we have confirmed what they have been hearing from God and thought that they were all alone. There is a company of witnesses forming, an army that God is preparing to go forth without the inhibitions of their controlling ecclesiarches. God is preparing the hearts of those in His bride to obey His call to "Come out of her my people," the call that follows this angel. The lights are coming on in the minds of His beloved saints.

God bless you all as you "follow the Lamb wherever He goes."

Unreplacing Jesus

Part 2 of Falling Away from the Simple Faith

By George Davis and Michael Clark

Although he is incapable of creating anything original, Satan is a masterful counterfeiter. He is the arch-imitator, and has his own befouled copy of virtually everything God has created. As creation bears the image and likeness God, likewise what Satan creates replicates bears his likeness and disposition. For example, Satan's copy of the Son of God is the "the son of Perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Satan lacks the power to attack God frontally. He has already tried that and failed. Therefore, his attacks upon heaven have of necessity become more cloaked, guileful and illusory. He comes as an angel of light-posturing as a messenger of God. He loves to pass himself off as God. He has never taken his greedy eyes off God's throne. Lacking the might to tear down the purposes of God, he has turned to deceive man, God's most precious creation. The objective-to pass his counterfeits off as God's originals. The primary difference is that his perverted version has himself subtly woven into it. It will possess his character, his spirit, and will manifest his purposes. Christianity is not a religion. Satan loves religion, because it is powerless, and poses absolutely no threat to him. In fact I believe that religion is Satan's counterfeit for Christianity. As there is only "One faith," what then are all these other religions? Clearly religion is Satan's creation, as it does indeed possess the character of Satan. The name itself speaks of the bondage of hell. Here is how Robert Brinsmead defines religion:

What is religion? "Re" means "again"; "ligare" means "to bind." The work of religion is to bind man to God. As Paul discerned, the system of law (religion) served an important purpose (Gal. 3, 4). With the coming of Christ, however, God acted both to fulfill and to terminate this order. He fulfilled the goal of religion by uniting ("religioning") God and man in His incarnate Person.

When Christ shouted "it is finished," it announced that no longer was our existence to be defined by the religious categories of God (theology) and man; creator and creature, master and servant. Jesus tore those pillars down with his death. Now we are on a one on one relationship with God. We are friends now. The very pillars on which religion has been built were abolished.

To perpetuate religion in the face of the finished work of Christ is therefore but a manifestation of unbelief. In attempting to bind man with God, religion attempts to do (anti, "in the place of"; Christ) what was done already by Him. To continue to define human existence with the old categories of God and man is a fundamental attempt to perpetuate that which was terminated at Christ's death.

This I am certain is what our Lord referred to when he spoke so harshly to the religious aristocracy of His day.

You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: {or, from his own will or disposition} for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

The characteristic nature of religion is murder. Cain killed Abel over an act of religion.

What Satan fathers will take on his disposition. Why were the Pharisees so murderous? It is because the father of their particular brand of religion was "the devil." They had been involved in the satanic conspiracy to reduce that which is God's to the level of a humanly governed institution. And in doing so they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man (Romans 1:23) It is the nature of the religious man to create a god after his own image-to drag God down to his level. But it is God's design as He has created us in His own image, to conform us into the likeness of His Son. Religion brings God down and corrupts His image. Faith in Jesus however, raises man up, restoring in him the true God likeness for which he was originally created.

Our destiny is to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Romans 8:29) Creation itself travails for this. (Romans 8:22) Paul also groaned in travail for the children of God, that Christ should be formed in them (Galatians 4:19).

Contrariwise, everything fathered by Satan conforms to his will and temperament.

Jesus looked beyond the religious exterior to the heart motivations. He knew that beneath their beautiful outward appearance, the Pharisees like whited sepulchres were full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:27) They were hypocrites acting out their religious role. (Matthew 23:27) Religious man is concerned with looking good outwardly-making a fair show in the flesh (Galatians 6:12). They mind earthly things (Philippians 3:19). They do indeed look good on the outside. But God looks on the heart.

If Jesus conducted a trial, to determine who is the father of today's church, what would be His verdict? Whose character does it bear His or Satan's? Would the words, "You are of your father the devil" once again be his reply? Would these words of Jesus ring as true today as they did in the first century? Would he address the contemporary church as good and faithful servants or a generation of vipers? I ask you, what does the weight of evidence imply? Don't be fooled! Such a trial is indeed taking place! Heaven is testing every man's work, and it will be manifest.

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire. (1 Corinthians 3:13)

When Jesus and the disciples were walking out of Jerusalem just before He was crucified, the disciples called His attention to the glory of Herod's temple. Jesus was not impressed. He was not only NOT impressed, but He prophesied its destruction when He said, "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Just as it was in those final days of ancient

Israel, so is it today in the last hours of the apostate systems of men which now masquerade as the Church.

It is clear that we are living in the day wherein Christ will expose the sordid history of the fallen church for what it really is. For if His children are ever going to be free, and see the restoration of God's purposes, they must discern Satan's fraudulent copies, and turn from dead religion to the living God as was His purpose 2000 years ago in the destruction of Jerusalem. They must turn from the counterfeits to Christ. They must detect every replacement for Christ, and forsake it for that which is True. It is all about trading up to Jesus-thus the term Un-Replacing Christ.

Now let us listen in as Paul warns the Corinthian believers about this great satanic rip off. Listen as Paul exposes Satan's plot to take or fill the place of Christ with his counterfeits.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted-you may well put up with it! (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, NKJV)

Putting up with:

Another Jesus
A different spirit
A different gospel

Another Jesus

The entire offensive strategy of Satan can be summed up in one word, and that word is antichrist. Antichrist is a compound word consisting of *Anti-an-tee* which means over against, opposite to, before, instead of, in place of (something), and *Christos*--The Messiah or anointed one. The word *antichrist* implies much more than Satan's contentious and combatant posture toward Christ. It manifests a diabolic plot. It is a spirit absorbed and driven by an ambition to replace Christ-to sit in His stead-to counterfeit the Anointed One. The first century apostles had been taught by Jesus himself that this antichrist spirit would manifest itself through those who would later come saying, "I am Christ" or "I am the anointed one" (Matthew 24:5 and 23) And with only the passing of a few years after Christ's resurrection and ascension, the apostle John could clearly see that the spirit, ambitious to replace Christ, was now already in the world.

And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 John 4:3)

"Its here," said John. "The spirit which you heard would come--the spirit of antichrist."

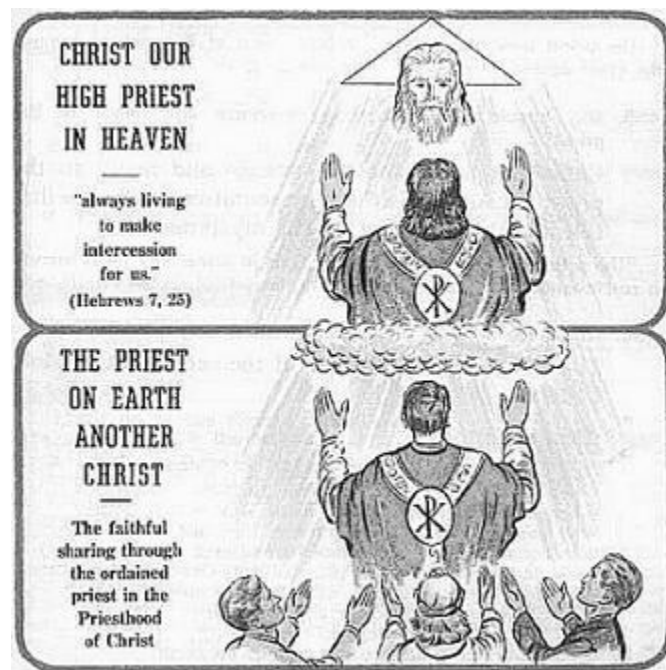
From John's day until now, this perverse spirit has infected and affected the historic flow of events throughout church history, taking on bolder and bolder manifestations-more

overt and militant. What was once cloaked and illusory is now played out in broad daylight, and none could stop it. Little by little Christ was being replaced, and the Holy Spirit's voice was silenced in preference of the rhetoric of men.

It is important to note here that the title "Vicar of Christ" given to the Pope comes from the title "Vicarius Christi" used by Emperor Constantine. "Vicar" means "a substitute." Thus, the title "Vicar of Christ" means "a substitute for Christ" or in His stead. Consider this quote from Pope Pius XI,

"The priest is, indeed, another Christ, or in some way, he is himself a continuation of Christ."

Catholics believe that every priest is an "alter christus." And while not recognizing the priesthood of all believers, they separate the people into two classes, priests and parishioners. Within this framework the priest's logical place is between the parishioners and Christ. So in the creation of a special ruling caste of ministers, the Clergy, there is the reduction of the rest of the congregation to the status of poor lowly laity, inferring the unwashed masses. Satan knew that this dichotomous state would effectively set the stage for a mass replacement of Christ. He would replace Christ with other mediators—with vicarius Christs or as they are often called vicars. In one fell swoop he would replace the priesthood of believer and Christ. How would he do it? Enter the clergyman, the new and improved substitute for both Christ and His true priests—the priesthood of all believers. The clergyman would shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, hindering any who would dare to pass, running interference between God and man and quickly killing all that would dare relate directly to Jesus.



This illustration from a Catholic publication clearly displays their priestly paradigm. You will note that they have many mediators between God and man. There is Christ who is depicted as wearing their priestly vestments, making intercession in heaven. Immediately below him are the earthly priests, who intercede between Christ and the people. And below them are the faithful and subservient parishioners, who relate through the ordained priesthood.

I, Michael, was raised in this system. I spent years being trained up in "the Faith," as it is called. Part of that training was on how to and to whom to pray. I was told that there are many intercessors, different ones had different purposes. For instance if one was lost or taking a trip we were to pray to Saint Christopher for our safety. He in turn went to Jesus and handled our petition. I was also told that I could not pray directly to the Father (there goes the Lord's prayer), because He only heard Jesus' prayers. In fact it was questionable that Jesus would even hear my prayers so it was better to pray to Mary His mother, because the Son always listens to His mother. Now there is even a move afoot to make Mary the co-redeemer equal to Christ.

Now Protestants are quick to throw stones at such activity, calling it blasphemy. The very idea that anyone would replace Christ as the sole mediator between God and man is preposterous. However, they do not realize the very practice of the traditional pastor originates in the roman priesthood. They are blinded to the similarities between the two. "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" (John 8:7). It is time to pull the log out of our own eye.

The Great Reformation sought to restore to the Church to the simplicity of faith in Christ alone for salvation. They put the scriptures in the hands of the believers, thus opening to the common man the ability to confirm God's word for themselves. So doing, many once again found their Shepherd's voice in the written word. But with all these wonderful changes the reformation did not go far enough. That papal system of a special priest class and the need of special buildings for worship still remain intact.

The traditional pastor may just as effectively serve in replacing Christ, as does the vicar. Both serve as mediators through whom all things coming from and going to God must pass. He still is the hub of all church activity. Little goes on without his personal supervision. "I will run this by my pastor" is the common phrase of those who have been rendered incapable of making their own decisions. This is due to years of yielding their right and responsibility as priests and intercessors before God. This constant intermediary interference is the distraction that continues to block the path to the Lord-obscuring Him with other christs. Jesus said,

I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. . .and there will be one flock with one shepherd. (See John.10:14-16, NLT)

This brings us to the often-asked question, "Who is your covering?" The Protestant concept of covering is an offshoot of the papal teaching on apostolic secession. Were it

not for a 1000 years of papal conditioning we could have never bought this deception. Both vicar and pastoral covering effectively reduce the believer to a vicarious relationship to God. Worshipping God second-hand, through these ordained priests and ministers, who by their very positions "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men." The parishioners or laity are taught to receive nothing that is not first approved of by the priest or pastor. As the priest is a mediator stationed between the people and God, so is the pastor or covering. The ones who refuse to submit to this covering are said to be rebellious. And it is also very clear that this system of accountability was the creation of man for the purpose of controlling the masses in the name of God.

It is interesting that the whole teaching of coverings is brought up by the apostle Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Here in chapter eleven, Paul explains that "every man praying or prophesying with his head covered, dishonors his head." He goes on to say, "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God." However, the boldest statement against this false doctrine is in verse three, where Paul says, "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ. . .and the head of Christ is God." Again we see that there is only ONE Mediator between God and mankind, and that is Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5).

Religion would make it rebellion to relate directly to Christ. In man's opinion you simply cannot do that without a covering. O dear Christian, if you have not as yet joined the illustrious fraternity of "heretics" who would dare to relate to Christ directly, you are living far below your rightful place as joint heir in Christ.

Neither Jesus nor the apostles taught that any man should be our covering. In fact, Paul and his fellow workers were not demanding at all, but instead appealed to "every man's conscience in the sight of God" (Corinthians 4:2). In this he shows that he is not usurping that unity and bond between the believer and His Lord. Paul also wrote regarding matters of conscience that every man should be "fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). The essence of faith is that every man must be connected to God himself without any human interference.

When leading men, you can insist that they follow your instructions to the letter. This is done on every level of society and men follow the letter of the law. However, this does not bring about a heart-felt obedience, but one that is totally external. You often see this as you drive your car. The sign says, "Speed Limit 55" and every other car is going 65+. These other drivers are not convinced of the legitimacy of the posted speed. They have not been fully persuaded in their minds. For one to follow His Lord in heart felt obedience, there must be a heart change which comes from a relationship with God alone, taught of Him and not of men. Without this direct heart connection to the will of God, being fully persuaded by Him, any effort to obey is presumption not faith. Any action taken, that is not the result of a man's faith between himself and God, having been persuaded in his heart is not of faith and accordingly misses God's mark. To force a premature obedience, before the individual has fully resolved the issue in his heart before God, is to damage their conscience. And the one forcing the external obedience is destroying another with their meats.

If a man has a human mediator that is dictating the will of God to him, he will not be fully persuaded, for with this kind of obedience there will be a corresponding lack of grace that is necessary to obey fully. Grace is a gift that comes from God alone and not from men. Only God can change a man's heart and thus change him into the likeness of Christ. Many have been remodeled into the image of a man whom they obey as a result of this false covering, but our only model as a believer is Christ.

It is between God and the individual as Paul so well points out, "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God" (Romans 14:22). Paul went on to say, "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Every man is to have faith, and to have it to himself before God. It is only logical then that every one of us shall give account of himself to God. There will be no excuses, no one to blame for leading us astray. We cannot blame it on Pastor so-and-so who said such-and-such. It is our responsibility to try all things, to test the spirits. For we are charged with the responsibility to work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12). If we live, we are to live unto the Lord; for "it is in Him we live and move and have our being." If we die, we are to die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's (Romans 14:8). Our life is to be lived unto the Lord, not to, or through man. Paul wrote I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus" (Romans 14:14). Paul had this to say to the busybodies of his day whom he said look down on another Christian.

So why do you condemn another Christian? Why do you look down on another Christian? Remember, each of us will stand personally before the judgment seat of God. For the Scriptures say, "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow to me and every tongue will confess allegiance to God.'" Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God (Romans 14:10-12 NLT).

We see by the passage above that every believer is personally and directly accountable to the Lord, and will one day stand to give an accounting. This accountability is the only one with which we should be concerned. This is why in verse four of the same chapter Paul cleared up the whole issue of accountability by writing, "Who are you to condemn God's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him tell them whether they are right or wrong. The Lord's power will help them do as they should." Now tell me, does that seem alien to today's notion of accountability?

In comparison, the Pope, who was thought to be infallible, was considered to be the rightful "director and judge of all consciences." And regarding the resulting abuses of this J.A. Wylie wrote,

But what action is it that does not involve duty? There is nothing a man can do,--scarce anything he can leave undone,--in which the interests of religion are not more or less directly concerned, and in which the Pope has not a pretext for thrusting in his direction. He can prescribe the food a man is to eat, the person with whom he is to trade, the master whom he is to serve, or the menial whom he is to hire. One can marry only whom the priest pleases; and can send one's children to no school which the Pope has disallowed; he must be told how often to come to confession, and what proportion of his goods to

give to the Church; above all, his conscience must be directed in the important matter of his last will and testament. He cannot bury his dead unless he is on good terms with the Church.

Does this sound familiar to you? This is some of the very same language used in the discipleship movement of the 70's and 80's. They were also told who to marry when to take their vacations and whether they could take their wives to a movie and what they could spend on popcorn. They were even told where they could send their children to school. As the words shepherding and discipleship have fallen into disfavor, due to the abuses of this movement, we have today the same deception wrapped in a new buzzword, accountability. If your relationship with God is not powerful enough to produce correct living, then no amount of human accountability will help. If His grace has not effected our wills, and we do not love Him enough to obey Him without man looking over our shoulders, what kind of salvation is that?

But didn't Paul tell the senior members of the Ephesian church that the Holy Spirit had given them the authority to govern over other members? Didn't Paul say, "over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers"? (Acts 20:28) The Greek word *en* translated *over* in this passage is incorrectly translated. *En* occurs 2782 times in the New Testament and is nowhere else translated *over*. Why? Someone wanted to justify their erroneous right to rule over the heritage of God. The preposition *en* is correctly translated *among*, *in*, *by*, or *with*. It can never rightly be translated *over*. The first century elders were among, not over. They knew nothing of being a man's covering.

For over 1900 years now, we have seen the characteristic tendencies of this spirit of antichrist played out in the global trading down from Christ to religion. We see the spirit of antichrist at work substituting another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel.

The ones Paul accused of preaching another Jesus were those Christians of the first century known as the Judaizers. The Judaizers would not give up their identity, and national pride as God's keepers of the law. Therefore, in order to justify their religion, they had to create a christ in keeping with their own religious views. Religious man has created a picture of Christ as conquer-austere and frightful. They have created a christ in their own image, reflecting their own ambitions. Christ's servanthood, being the most powerful argument against tyranny, was hidden in order to justify their control and subjugation of others. Accordingly they depicted a ruling Christ in order to justify their own despotism. In order to exalt themselves they had to distort the example of Christ and redefine His purposes by the creation of doctrines in which their supposed right to reign was strengthened. This is why the so-called "Christian art" of the early papal era rarely if ever, portrayed Christ as a servant.

These Judaizers that Paul accused of preaching another Jesus were not content with the humble, serving messiah, which in fact was offensive to them. They tended to ascribe to the messianic consensus of the day. Theirs was a conquering Messiah, and it is an irrevocable law, you will take on the likeness of the Christ you see and serve. These men served a religious, controlling, legalistic christ--another christ--a christ that leads one into

bondage, not freedom. There was a Christ that struck fear in the hearts of man, leaving them trembling at the foot of the mount, as it was with the children of Israel in the wilderness. We will cover this in more detail later, but for now it suffices to say that fear is the fueling principle of religion. It leaves man cowering before a vengeful God.

A Different spirit

The Greek word for spirit is *pneuma*, meaning "The wind" or "breath." The spirit, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial and yet powerful. Although you cannot see the wind itself, you can see its effect. Invisible the wind is the most powerful force in nature. Likewise the Spirit of God is invisible and immeasurably powerful, and the effects thereof unfathomable. Spirit is what inspires, animates a thing. And so in a real sense actions manifest the spiritual nature of a thing. *Pneuma* also speaks of purpose, and aim. (2 Cor. 12:18)

Pneuma, is what enlivens a thing, resulting in corresponding thoughts and actions.

As the fruit of the Holy Spirit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23) So this different or counterfeit spirit has its own fruit. Every spirit has its own fruit, holy or unholy. The fruit of the different spirit is bondage, fear, pride and tyranny. It is expressed in the ambition for conquest-to bring others under fleshly control. But where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. (2 Corinthians 3:17) I believe that Christianity today lives, by both the Holy Spirit, and a different spirit. Resulting in a kind of Dr. Jeckyl, Mr. Hyde brand of Christianity. One moment all is love, joy, and peace, and the next-fighting, pride self-exaltation, and abuses of every form. In short, all hell breaks loose.

It is all too easy for Satan to thwart the work of God, through individuals who are driven by a different spirit. Someone will inevitably rise up with design to bring the work into the bondage of their control-to lead away disciples after themselves. Taking that which belongs to God and others and squander it upon their lusts. And lastly, they will smite you in the face if you attempt to correct the situation. This other spirit is a spirit of conquest, using fear to control and impel- fear of reprisal-fear of rejection. Any attempt to encourage action through fear is not in keeping with God's plan for obedience. God himself will not violate the wills of man, for in doing so he would violate a basic principle of love. Love solicits a willing response-a response unencumbered by the threats of fear. Perfect love casts out fear. Fear has torment, and it was never God's design to torment man into obedience-but to give us another Spirit eager to obey-the Spirit of His Son, crying Abba Father--Daddy, dear Daddy! He has given us the very Spirit of His Son-not a spirit of fear, but of love.

For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15)

The spirit of bondage and fear, or different spirit is used by religious men who do not hesitate to chain and bind, even using as their motivation the threat that God will get you

if you don't comply. Using and abusing the name of the one that loves us so much that He gave His only Son. How dare we use His name to threaten people into compliance, depicting Him as angry and eager to meet out retribution! According to the author of the book of Hebrews we are to "consider one another to provoke (incite) unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:24). We are to foster love not fear. This is why those moved to action by this "different spirit must preach another christ--one more stern and demanding, commanding the response of fear. Fear is the motivation for all earthly government. (Romans 13:4) However love is the constraining factor in the kingdom of God--a love that casts out fear.

There is no fear in love (1 John 4:18) Furthermore, love that has matured or is full-grown casts out or displaces fear. The one, who fears, has not experienced love's perfection. God's love even overcomes the greatest fear of all--the fear of death.

It is a love that totally displaces even the basic instinct of self-preservation To the point that those so motivated would willingly lay down their lives for each other. It is clear that this different spirit here referred to by Paul, is the same spirit of conquest which fueled the inquisition. Jesus warned the disciples regarding the spirit that inspired the religion of the Pharisees, saying, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yes, the time is coming, that whosoever kills you will think that he is doing God a service" (John 16:2).

It was that very spirit that drove Saul of Tarsus.

For ye bear with a man, if he bringeth you into bondage, if he devoureth you, if he taketh you captive, if he exalteth himself, if he smiteth you on the face. (2 Corinthians 11:20, ASV)

Brings you into bondage--under their control

Devours--wastes your substance--greed

Takes you captive--theft of freedom itself

Exalts himself--pride--antichrist spirit

Smites you on the face--tyranny

Here we have described some of the characteristics of this different spirit.

It is a spirit of conquest. A spirit which brings one under the control of the dominate leader. Much like a wolf pack. This different spirit squanders through greed. It is a spirit that uses people, and possessions. It is a spirit of self-transformation, as the messengers of this spirit transform themselves, in the same manner that Satan transforms into an angel of light.

It is a spirit of theft--taking what belongs to another.

The word *takes* (*lambanw lambano* lam-ban'-o) means "to seize, to lay hold of, apprehend and take by craft (our catch, used of hunters, fisherman, etc.), to circumvent one by craft and fraud." How do you catch a fish? Let's take fly-fishing for instance. A

fisherman's fly is carefully tied to replicate a real fly, the kind that the fish is accustomed to eating. The artificial fly looks good but it is deadly if you are a fish.

For you allow it, if a man brings you into bondage to himself, if a man squanders and wastes your substance, stripping you of your goods. If a man, procures for himself what is yours, claiming it to be his own. If a man lifted up with pride raise up, exalting himself on high, if a man smite you on the face. (2 Corinthians 11:20, our own translation)

A Different gospel

We find certain key words and phrases within the letters of Paul, which reveal the nature of this different gospel. Referring to those false apostles who heralded this different gospel, Paul made this interesting statement: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13).

The difference between religion and Christianity is who is doing the transforming. Religion depends upon the discipline of the will to change. Paul called it will-worship, implying that it originated in the will of man. But in true Christianity change is the result of the Spirit of God conforming us into the likeness of His Son.

Paul asked the Galatian believers this probing question, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" They had been bewitched into accepting a form of godliness, and denying the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5). Religion is man-powered, not God-powered.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

Christianity is God from beginning to finish. He is the one that started the work in us, and he must finish it. It is as for beyond the capacity of man as is the creation and maintenance of the universe. If man could save himself perhaps he could sanctify himself. If man was the author of his conversion, then maybe he could be its finisher and perfecter thereof. (Hebrews 12:2) Jesus is the Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8) He is the one by whom all things consist (Colossians 1:17). Paul knew this, so he did not meddle in God affairs. Instead Paul's speech betrays a faith in God's workmanship, to the point of him committing those believers he so dearly loved into the creative hands of the one who not only formed, but also holds all things together--the finisher. Paul repeatedly expresses his faith in the author and the finisher. In writing to the Church at Corinth, Paul knew that he was addressing a troubled assembly. He knew that there was division and immorality afoot. He must even correct a brother for having sex with his father's wife. Now knowing all this, how then does Paul begin a letter to such a Church?

That in every thing you are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:5-8)

Where is Paul's faith? It is in the faithful one. God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (verse 9).

Paul knew that in spite of their many problems, the church at Corinth was none the less in the hands of the Author and Finisher.

If such problems existed in one of today's ultra-institutional churches, it would be shut down in a blink. But Paul knew that it was God who gave the increase, and it was He who would establish their hearts in holiness.

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. (1 Thessalonians 3 12-13)

In his final meeting with the elders of Ephesus, Paul warned them regarding the coming apostasy, and then said a tearful goodbye to those whom he so dearly loved. Knowing that he would never come this way again he said, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

We are his workmanship. We do not transform ourselves. We are created in Christ Jesus unto good works and even those are not of our own choosing. They are works "which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God (2 Corinthians 3:5). "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

So what will it be, self-transforming religion, with its "touch not, taste not, handle not" will-worship, or trust in the author and finisher? If we do not have faith in the author and finisher, we cannot help but meddle in His affairs. We will labor under the illusion that our steadying hand is necessary.

When King David went to bring up the ark of the Lord, they carried the ark of God on a new cart. The driver of the cart was a man named Uzza. Now David was excited and he and all Israel with a full orchestra played and sang with all their might before God. Finally they arrived at the threshing floor of Chidon, where the oxen stumbled, and Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark.

The Lord's anger was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him. Why? Because he put his hand to the ark(1 Chronicles 13: 7-10). This brought an end to the festivities. There is much to be learned from this. They were not to be carrying the ark on a cart in the first place. It was to be borne on the shoulders of the priests. Secondly, Numbers 4:15 warned

the Levites when they carrying the holy things they were not to touch any part of it lest they die.

But now let us consider this on a more personal level--what this means to us individually. How should we then live? Most Christians don't realize it but most religious observances were added as religious fillers in times of Spiritual declination. They had to do something when they got together.

As the church gradually traded faith and trust in Jesus for systematic theology, likewise the same deceptions if embraced by the new Christian will result in the same apostasy on a personal level. As they enthusiastically embrace the long list of does and don'ts presented to them as the way of obedience, not realizing that it is the thief that will, little by little, take and fill the place of intimate communion with Christ. Thus begins the trading process--the replacing of Christ with religion. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (Colossians 2:8) Where they once trusted in Christ alone for salvation, now they trust in their own righteousness, as measured by their new standard of adherence. Where once they presented every quest and request to Christ, now they seek their solutions from the professional replacements of Christ-men who are trained to vend the answers they seek. Once they heard the Spirit's voice revealing Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. Now they are involved in concerns regarding the way the truth is done, and the hope of finding life by the doing. Once it was enough to withdraw to a quiet place and commune for hours and days on end. Now they cannot rest until they are surrounded with noise, religious noise--the clamor of the religious machine. They can no longer abide solitude, for they have lost touch with the calming reality of which Christ spoke when He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Consequently when they are not in a crowd, they are lonely. They have traded Gethsemane, for Vanity Fair--communion for commotion.

Most Christians look back to the early days, just following their conversion, with fondness. They were days of wander--days of intimate communion with Christ. Waves of peace and joy flooded their beings. The weight of sin they had carried all their lives was lifted and they felt a lightness, and buoyancy, which elevating them above the temporal plain. The realities of heaven were more substantial than was the material, and earthly. When I asked my wife Charlotte, "What were those early days like for you?" She said, "It was like being in love for the first time." And she is right. Many, in remembering those early days, look back with a sense of puzzlement. Why? Why can't we have that kind of relationship with the Father all the time? In expressing this desire for uninterrupted communion with Christ, and my grief that it was no longer a reality in my own life, a dear misinformed sister answered my quandary something like this. "Then you were a baby in the Lord, and required a lot of pampering. But now you are growing up and must walk by faith not feelings." By this I learned that it was childish to love and revel in the presence of the Lord. I even felt guilty for secretly desiring it. I watched with jealous eyes, as others entering the kingdom expressed the joy and wonderment, which I secretly coveted. But I am no longer a baby, I thought, I must put away such childish things. I remember some of the older ones commenting on these young zealots, saying, "Just give

them some time, they're on an emotional high right now, but they will come down, and join in the program with the rest of us." And as I watched, that is exactly what happened. Before long the gleam in their eyes was gone. And the jubilant expressions of joy were quelled, as their faces took on the listless look, which I had seen as characteristic of the "mature Christian." The more they joined in the program the more spiritually lethargic they became.

As their capacity for life, joy, and mystery, was slowly replaced by the disciplines of systematic theology, their childlike wonderment correspondingly declined. We had been led away captives and we didn't even know it.

So much for the problem! What is the answer? How do we un-replace Jesus?

The answer is Christ! Christ plus nothing! He is not the figurehead of Christianity. Christ is Christianity! The answer is not just truth about Him, but Christ HIMSELF. HE is the way, the truth and the life.

I often hear people say, "I wish I could get hold of Divine Healing, but I cannot." Sometimes they say, "I have got it." If I ask them, "What have you got?" the answer is sometimes, "I have got the blessing", sometimes it is, "I have got the theory"; sometimes it is, "I have got the healing"; sometimes, "I have got the sanctification." But I thank God we have been taught that it is not the blessing, it is not the healing, it is not the sanctification, it is not the thing, it is not the it that you want, but it is something better. It is "the Christ"; it is Himself. How often that comes out in His Word-"Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses", Himself "bare our sins in his own body on the tree"! (A. B. Simpson, *Himself*)

From dead works to "Christ in you"

Repentance simply means to turn and go the other way. To cease from one thing, embracing another. Repentance from dead works is nothing more than turning from dead religion-the powerless form of godliness, to the living God. It is to trade up from religion for Christ. It is to cease from will-worship that is grounded purely in the rudimentary disciplines of the flesh, and to embrace the Person who is himself salvation. It is to know Christ as our all and all. It is to understand that wisdom is not an it. It is Jesus. Righteousness is not an it. It is Christ. Sanctification is not an it. It is He. Redemption is not an it. It is union to the person of Jesus Christ.

But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glories let him glory in the Lord. (1Corinthians 1:30-31)

Religion is you living for God-Christianity is Christ living in and through you. Religion is man working for God; Christianity is God working in us to will and to do. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and

gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) We are led away captive when we are bewitched from the reality of Christ living in and through us--from He Himself being our life to a systematic, liturgical, and creedal attempt at meriting life through our doing.

Jesus, in a prophetic glance into the future, foresaw the state of those who would refuse to trade their religion for the knowledge of Himself.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? (Matthew 7:22)

The Lord's response to these men/women who by today's standard would be looked up to as Spiritual giants is shocking. They had been involved in the work of the Lord.

They came bringing results, but they did not know him. They had forgotten, or sadder yet had never known that Christianity is about nothing else but knowing Christ. It is about knowing Him, being conformed to his image. It is not about our doing all the right things. It is the sad tale of those who are doing all the right Christian things, and are not engaged in the only legitimate pursuit in the Kingdom of God. It has nothing to do with my ministry, my doing.

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:23)

I never knew you? You mean these men who came saying, "Lord, Lord," men who, prophesied, cast out devils, and had done many wonderful works in Christ's name, did not know Him? Paul's consuming passion was to know Christ.

It was his goal, to reach the prize of this high calling. He counted all things--his righteousness, his pride in his religious achievements--but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." Paul counted his religion as dung in order to win Christ (Philippians 3:8). Regarding the pursuit of knowing and winning Christ Paul went on to write, Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing you are otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Philippians 3:15). It is not acceptable to be otherwise minded. If you are God will reveal this unto you. It is not acceptable to opt for the superficiality of religion over knowing Christ. It is not acceptable to reduce Christianity to the status of religion, as though that which pleased him most is our business. It's all Christ! "Christ in you is the hope of glory!" It is all about the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. All correct doing flows from an intimate knowledge of Christ. They that know their God shall be strong, and do exploits (Daniel 11:32). God has extended His hand of intimacy, and has rent the middle wall of partition. So that by the blood of his Son we might come beyond the rent veil into his presence. But many prefer to play in the outer court. They love the symbols and ceremonies of religion. They choose the shadow rather than the substance, the ritual over the reality, which is Christ.

Repent of the human bent toward irresponsibility.

Acknowledge that you have rejected God's government in your life by your preference of human government (see 1 Samuel 8:19-20). Know that the abdication of you your God given responsibilities to men was very likely done because of an inordinate desire for their approval and acceptance. Ask the Father if this is true of you.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice." Do you hear his voice? If not, don't settle for anything less. Shut yourself in with God, just you and Him alone, until you hear from heaven firsthand.

Many Christians do not hear Christ's voice for the religious noise around them. And if they are searching for Him, they are looking in all the wrong places. Revivals, guest speakers, seminars, special meetings, elite training class, and oh yes, lest I forget, bible college. Youth retreats, adult retreats, retreat retreats. They are in the middle of every religious activity in town, and planning a few of their own.

But as it was with Elijah, the LORD was not in the strong wind even though it "rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD." Neither was the LORD in the earthquake or the fire. But Elijah heard a whisper, a still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13). The whisper cannot be heard in the hype and whirlwind created by the flapping of our own wings. His voice cannot be heard over the noise of the earthquake. It is not to be found in flash, fire, and smoke of religion.

O dear Christian, fall on your face and don't get up until you have heard from God firsthand. Wait upon Him, resisting the temptation to run to man for the answer and you will mount up with wings as eagles. It is worth your while to wait upon the Lord.

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

Come boldly before God's throne.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Jesus has purchased the right of direct access on our behalf. We may enter by His blood, and His merit, not our own. It is the responsibility of all believers to approach God as intercessors for themselves and others.

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2)

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Test yourselves and find out if you really are true to your faith. If you pass the test, you will discover that Christ is living in you. But if Christ isn't living in you, you have failed. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus. (Ephesians 4:21)

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)