For those of you who are new to TruthForFree.com and even those of you who are return visitors and personal friends, I would like to just share a "few" thoughts, explaining where I'm coming from on a few things. What follows in this article are some things that the Lord has stirred in my heart over the past several years and through which He has taught me through some interesting and unfamiliar circumstances. You can read more in this regard if you visit my "About Us" page.

The comments I offer here are merely musings from a person who has been experiencing a deep work of God in his heart. I'm not ignorant of my own inadequacies and my own need to be conformed into His image. I know that I am still too carnal, too unsubmitted to the Lordship of Christ, and more resistant to change than I long to be. How's that for an introduction? ;) I just open with that to let you know that I know God is not finished with me yet and nothing here is intended to present myself as anything more than a normal guy with normal struggles, but who loves God deeply and desires to follow the lead of His Spirit with all my heart. The hard words this article presents I have walked and am walking through in my own life. They are conclusions wrought from study in the Word (the Bible), personal experience and observation.

I feel that I have to vent these things somehow because I believe God has been opening my eyes for a reason. This website originally began as a simple testimony of the things God was doing through some prayer meetings in my home (when I lived in Kennewick, WA). Unbelievably, nearly 20 years have passed since then (perhaps more by the time some of you get around to reading this) and God has invigorated me with fresh revelation, insight and passion to know Him closer without distraction and to encourage my brothers and sisters in Christ (and the lost) with the Gospel truth! I cannot remain silent. I cannot simply avoid speaking because some things may be controversial or uncomfortable to traditional religious thinking. The truth is without compromise and that must be my goal as well. I hope you will be willing to engage with me on the same journey. It is the truth that sets us free! Not just any truth - but God's Truth, Jesus, and all that He reveals to us day-by-day as well as through His written Word!

However, for those of you who find yourselves in disagreement with the content of this website, know that I wish you God's best and I do not suppose that you are required to take my word (or anyone else's for that matter) for anything. You are, of course, free to leave this site and go someplace else. I pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you and minister His truth to you according to His perfect will. God bless you.

God is so merciful and I want to extend the same grace to all who read the following. I do not intend to offend anyone observing this content. If the Spirit of the Lord breathes on something here, I pray you will receive it with humility and yield to the conviction and counsel of God's Spirit. It's easy to become defensive when someone suggests that all is not well in our lives and in our walk with Christ. We don't like to think of such things, but we must if we are to move ahead in Him. Some of this might come across as a little radical (especially if the reader is unfamiliar with these kinds of perspectives on Christianity), but I want to make it clear that my heart is completely to see God awaken His people and get their eyes back on Jesus! Folks, that includes me! I am in the process of awaking to many things myself that I have been blind to for too long. Some of this blindness has existed throughout most of my life within the Institutional Church (a system represented by religious buildings and programs ordered by men). God is shaking me and breaking me (and healing me). Some of it is painful but God's grace is sufficient and I cannot express the joy I have in knowing that He is walking through all of these things with me! God is setting me free from the blinders of religion and stirring a fresh desperation for Him like I have not known.
I really want to encourage you all to not allow yourself to become content with merely practicing religion! I won't lie to you; pursuing intimate relationship and choosing to run after the truth is sometimes more difficult. It means you have to stop placing so much confidence in men and lay all your cares and insecurities before Jesus. It means you have to face the cross and allow the Spirit of God to have His way entirely. As that transpires, sometimes what people view externally may not look quite as pleasant as the show people manifest on a Sunday morning church service. But God isn't looking for a religious show and He isn't offended by our flaws. He wants our heart, manifested with all sincerity before Him. There are many stories in the New Testament of God accepting humble sinners because they didn't hide their sins but came honestly before the Lord with fear and trembling. These went away justified while those who stood pious and proud of their own righteousness were rejected by God. In fact, Jesus even boldly told the religious leaders of His day that many corrupt tax collectors and harlots would get into His kingdom before they would because they believed in Him and chose to follow Him despite their hangups and imperfections.

Luke 18:10-14 - Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a dishonest tax collector. The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: "I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income." But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner." I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored.

Matthew 21:31b-32 - "...I assure you, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. For John the Baptist came and showed you the way to life, and you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to turn from your sins and believe him."

Matthew 22:8-10 - And he said to his servants, "the wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren't worthy of the honor. Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see." So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

This truth stands in contrast with the doctrine many are preaching today that says, God loves you just the way you are, and they presume this means sin doesn't matter at all. They will even use the same examples I just used to show how God, throughout Scripture, showed mercy to sinners, suggesting that God doesn't care about sin. That is NOT what I am suggesting! God loves the sinner and God accepts those who are humble, honest and contrite in heart before him. This is why I say that He is not surprised by our sin or offended by our flaws. Perhaps I should say it this way; that He is not intimidated by our hangups. Religion stalls at the issue of sin, but God's love pierces through it. He is able to cut through those things and deal with us as a loving Father. Love includes discipline and we should not be surprised by that. The Holy Spirit will convict us of sin and righteousness (as the Scripture says). I just wanted to add that detail because I am seeing a slighted presentation of Scripture by many in today's modern (emergent / post-modern) church system; They use the terminology God is love and imply that this means anything goes as long as you love God. The problem is that Scripture teaches us that to love God means we demonstrate that by obedience to His instruction. You cannot cherish your sin and claim to cherish God. That is a massive contradiction! The Savior set us free from the bondage of sin. That doesn't mean we don't struggle with sin still or that God doesn't care about it. It doesn't mean that we can do whatever we want and enjoy our sin as we also propose to be worshipers of God and followers of Truth. But it does mean that Christ has set us free from condemnation and given us His Holy Spirit which works in us the power to mortify the deeds of our flesh.

As we engage this daily battle to subdue and put to death our sinful ways, we can rest confident in a gracious God, who is for us in this endeavor, not against us. He is not gazing down in disappointment, but living within us, walking through the issues of life with us, helping us grow and strengthening us in the activity of spiritual warfare day by day. We do not have a religious God that is imposing ritual and regulation in some lame attempt to control our outward actions. But He is literally changing us from within! There will be times that we fall, but while religion hurls accusations, condemnation and prescribes yet even more religion, Christ reaches out His hand and says, Get up my son... Let's try that one again. I love you. Keep your eyes on Me now and let's do this!

The post-modern churches say, God doesn't care that you have sin. It's okay to be homosexual. It's fine if you have sex outside of marriage. It doesn't matter what you allow your eyes to gaze upon (whether it be the lust of the flesh, immorality, sinful activities and mindsets). It doesn't matter if you dabble with new age ideologies and practices, it's okay to ignore SOME of the teachings of Jesus (you know, the ones you don't like or don't think fit in today's culture) and replace them with the teachings of religious leaders or secular theoretical ideas so long as you love God too. That all sounds warm and fuzzy and almost sounds like love (a god that lets you do whatever seems right to you), but it is not love at all. The Bible says (Proverbs 14:12) that there is a way that...
seems right to a man, but the end of it leads to death. It also says (Proverbs 12:15) that the way of a fool seems wise in his own eyes, but he that listens to counsel (of the Lord) is actually the wise one! Think about it; how can you claim to love God if you don’t love the Truth He’s given? How can you claim to be a follower of Christ, if you don’t actually follow Him but rather follow the ways of men?

A true Father loves His child, not by just letting that child do everything he wants, but He provides grace to grow and discipline for error. A good Father has a standard of righteousness that He expects His child to set the mark for. That mark is clear and visible! It is without compromise! The child may not always hit that mark and the Father knows this will happen... but there is never the thought in the child's mind that his Father doesn't care about whether or not His son presses forward to hit that mark. Sons want to please their fathers. This is true in the natural and ought to be no less true in the spiritual. I realize some have had abusive fathers in this life and those are not the kind of example I am talking about... but we have a good Father who loves us and I believe it is intrinsic to the nature of a child to want to please his parents!

This is what Paul meant when he talked (in Romans 7 and 8) about being spiritually minded. It doesn't mean you won't ever make mistakes. But the spiritually minded person does sense the conviction of the Spirit of God for his errors and he applies trust in the Lord for the strength and power to mortify those undesirable things that he knows miss the Father's mark. He does not walk in fear or religious condemnation, for he knows that His Father's love sustains him and that God's Word equips him and that His power infuses him to thwart every attack of the devil. He does not possess a mindset that presumes sin is irrelevant, but he knows that He has the power to overcome it because he belongs to the Overcomer! He walks with humility and a repentant heart, seeking to embrace the Truth and allow it to set him free completely!

**We Must Pursue Sincerity Rather Than Religious Approval**

It's not uncommon for those who think they are wise in their own eyes to have plenty to say (even angrily) about the rabble of us who are not afraid to be honest about things and still pursue the Lord with abandon. They will try to discredit us, mock us, point out our flaws, and mark us as rebels, dissenters, deceived and wounded souls, but it does not matter. Let them rant on. Through such sufferings God will even use these to keep us humble, walking in forgiveness and reliant upon Him. God will deal with them in His own way and His own timing and He will never leave us or forsake us. And as we keep our cups held toward heaven, He will faithfully fill that cup with Himself and He will supply a fresh understanding of our purpose in life with opportunities to live out that purpose as we walk in relationship with Him! Consider a man like King David. He was certainly not a perfect man. He even murdered a man, committed adultery, and missed the mark plenty of times - yet he always fell to his knees in repentance and kept his heart soft before the Lord. He was also a man of total sincerity. When he was angry, he voiced his complaints to God without shame. When he was overjoyed, he praised God. Even before he was established as King over Israel, when he was treated wrongly and his calling despised by other men of prominence and authority, God kept him strong, safe, and caused others to gather around him to support him, and God taught him in those humble, difficult places to trust the Lord. When he was in desperate need, he cried out to God. And when God corrected him, he submitted to God’s instruction. He lived with a constant willingness to obey God and give Him his whole life. As a result, God called David a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22) and he was even honored in Scripture as a typological figure of Christ who also came through his very lineage! So the next time you hear some religious judge criticize you while elevating himself or herself above you, remember: God is interested in a heart that is sincerely submitted to Him regardless of your circumstances, the way other people might view you, or your imperfections. God is not offended by your lack of perfection. If you are His child then Christ's righteousness has been imputed to you and the Father sees only His righteousness. But the moment you try to conceal things with a religious facade, you are stepping outside the boundary of His will. We must remain humble and submitted to His instruction and the work of His Spirit in our lives. There is much about the cross that is not pleasant to endure, but the rewards of intimate relationship with Jesus and the abundant life He gives far outweigh the pain of leaving behind that old nature.

I would suggest to you that probably the most essential part of the building and maintaining of a close and intimate relationship with Jesus (as well as with our other brothers and sisters in Christ); that is, a walk of sincerity! If you have the ability, I encourage you to order Wayne Jacobsen's teaching series called "Will The Real You Please Stand Up." I listened to this teaching series early on in my own exodus from organized religion and it helped me a great deal. Wayne presents an excellent teaching! Most of us who have been in church all of our lives have learned well how to "act" like Christians. In fact, that is largely what we are taught to do ("acting" spiritual is really the essence of religion). Most often we are compelled to respond a certain way, feel a certain way, look a certain way, act a certain way - even when that "act" denies what is truly going on inside us. Most of us who have attended church our whole Christian lives do not really feel free to be openly, blatantly honest about what's really in our hearts, so we put on smiles, speak in "Christianese" and learn to react to certain situations and engage in conversations with patterned responses. Sadly, we often do the same thing in our relationship with the Lord. We pray with words of religion and we say what we think He wants to hear and what we think will be most effective for us or someone else (especially if our prayers are being heard...
by others in a group setting), but rarely are we boldly honest. Friends, sincerity is crucial to our relationship with Christ and with the rest of the body of Christ. This issue of sincerity is the very complaint that most unbelievers have about us Christians! They hear our words, see our smiles, even are sometimes the recipient of our good deeds and yet they most often say, "those people seem so insincere, phony, plastic, un-genuine." Because of our insincerity every other action we employ as Christians become powerless in attempting to impact the lost with our faith. My Christian brothers and sisters, we have got to get a hold on this! We have got to learn what it means to be absolutely sincere!!! Even if it means we don't always look quite so spiritual as we would like everyone to believe about us (most of them, truth be told, are smart enough anyway to discern that we are many times just putting on a show!)

The New Testament teaches us that love is to be without hypocrisy (Romans 12:9). Our responses to one another needs to be sincere, not programmed or phony to cover up the real condition of our hearts. Because the institutional program has mostly taught us how to act like Christians and how to respond with religious words and deeds regardless of our inner conscience, emotions, thoughts and the daily struggle we work through, we have not learned how to relate to one another (or many times God) with absolute sincerity and honesty, nor have we felt safe or free to do so - certainly not when we are around lost people. And this neglect of sincerity is not only destructive to us individually but when we react to things according to our religious programmed mind-sets we impose those mind-sets on others instead of trusting the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts, to be the agent of conviction, counsel, comfort and transformation. We often don't want to exercise the grace and love to allow others to be sincere in their faith either. When they go through struggles, disappointment, or are dealing with anger, frustration, whatever, we often want to offer some positive religious answer or we tell them, "you shouldn't feel like that, you shouldn't act like that, you shouldn't talk like that." We don't give them the space to be sincere and we don't really trust that the Holy Spirit is able to transform them internally if all we do is grace them with love. Often we prescribe them some religious formula or suggest they get into counseling or some church program. The Holy Spirit is never the immediate trust. I'm not saying there is no place for sharing the truth with a struggling or ignorant believer, I am saying that first we need to learn how to operate in total sincerity and grace and we need to trust God with His children!

This is one of the major things I have had to work through in my own life. I am finding that 30 years of institutional religious programming is not so easy to shake off. I am sure that even this very article is stained with some religious influence that guides the very way I talk about things. This stuff just does not wash out as soon as you get a clue that it has permeated your entire approach to the Christian life. I have become an expert at insincerity and I think if most Christians would be completely honest they would agree this is many times true in their own lives. It is so easy, especially in the weekly church service, to fake spirituality for a couple of hours. Again, I wholeheartedly believe this is a huge part of what keeps us from truly growing spiritually and from building stronger, more meaningful relationships with one another. I confess that I am disgusted with the level of insincerity I am beginning to discover has ruled so much of my Christian life and practice. God forgive me! I do not want to wear those rags any longer. My friends, I encourage you to examine your own hearts in this also. We have got to move on to true sincerity in our walks with God and each other.

You Don't Have To Be An Evangelist... Just Be Real!

In church world we were often "encouraged" (prodded is often more like it) to be sure to get out there and share our faith with people. Some of our church organizations even set up training seminars, Sunday school or midweek classes, and Bible college courses to teach us how to evangelize effectively. As a result, we received the impression that you need have all the right words, the right evangelistic formula, the right answers to questions so you can argue properly, the proper catch phrases and hook-lines - all so that you can "win souls" into the kingdom. Ironically, most Christians tend to get annoyed when other religions employ the same kinds of tactics to win converts. Christians talk about how "those other false religions are just out there pushing their doctrine on people without having a real relationship with God." They shake their heads at those Mormon missionaries and Jehovah's Witnesses; "those poor lost souls; just doing what their religion tells them to do..." But are Christians really much different when it comes to this subject? I dare say, not at all.

Lots of professing Christians have turned their faith into the same stupid thing (a dead religion that needs converts to keep it running). They've made evangelism (or at least what they call "evangelism") a religious tenet of their so-called faith, and yet I'm now asking the question, "what faith?" Virtually nothing about organized religion's approach to "sharing the Gospel" has anything to do with faith or trust in the Holy Spirit. Instead, it's all about the "religious act of evangelism", following the proper pattern, and "you gotta win souls, you gotta win souls!" I can't tell you how many sermons I've heard over the years that lay guilt trips on you if your not out there "winning souls" to Jesus... Sigh... I'll never turn my nose up at a Mormon missionary again because I now realize I did the same thing in my days of submission to organized religion as well. I didn't know any better. I thought this is the way it's supposed to be done.

What's even more amazing is the fact that probably a majority of Christians don't even realize that the "Great Commission" wasn't even given to the entire body of Christ... It was given to eleven guys!
Mark 16:14-15 (CEV) - Afterwards, Jesus appeared to His eleven disciples as they were eating. He scolded them because they were too stubborn to believe the ones who had seen Him after He had been raised to life. Then He told them: "Go and preach the good news to everyone in the world."

Even more amazing is that Paul told the Colossian believers that this very commission had been fulfilled! In Colossians 1:23 he said, "...the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven..."

What we predominantly see in the New Testament (post the Gospels and the book of Acts) is instruction to believers on how to continue living in Christ once faith has come. This is not to say that it is wrong to go and preach the Gospel still, but we simply do not see some kind of blanket commission for all believers to be busy about a formal commission. Indeed God may still commission some to go and preach, but others He may not. Some may simply be called to bloom where they are planted. To impose a grand commission upon the entire body of Christ is to belittle the voice of the Holy Spirit within each believer. It is God's business to commission whomever He wills. This is not something any of us need to be anxious about. But if the Lord speaks to us, indeed we should obey... and I do believe that any true child of God will not be able to help but manifest that they are exactly that. If Christ really dwells in them, then there will be evidence that emanates from their life. The Bible calls this fruit. That doesn't necessarily mean it will be to involve themselves in some religious evangelism scheme. But the Holy Spirit will do His work through them and if that work is indeed present, then it is real and true, and will manifest spiritual fruit that cannot be dismissed.

Naturally, this mindset of "essential evangelism" creates a lot of feelings of guilt and anxiety if we don't pull this off perfectly or at least frequently. Evangelism is such a huge buzz term in organized religion. And why? I believe it is because, in all truth, it's the fuel that keeps the religious machine running. I dare say, most of this push is only about Jesus in name... and not always because of a sincere motivation by His followers to want to tell their friends about their relationship with God. People end up thinking that winning souls is what makes God happy with them and so they do it to appease a legalistic God, not because they genuinely love other people or want to talk about the Lord simply because He changed their life. And while most pastors won't admit to this, they know that without the institutional brand of so-called "evangelism", their church pews will be empty and there will be no one to volunteer to run the programs or pay the tithes (and thus their salaries).

I feel quite confident in telling folks that God is not looking for robot evangelists and He isn't concerned about polished presentations by those sharing Jesus with others. You see, one of the coolest things about the Gospel is that it is divinely revealed by God to those He is calling to salvation. That means it really doesn't matter how gifted a speaker you are, or whether or not you've been "properly trained" to evangelize. In fact, it takes all of the "strategizing" out of the entire evangelistic paradigm altogether! This is a difficult reality to accept for many Christians who have made it their life's mission to strategically evangelize people (or to entice others to do the same). Friends, the Gospel of Jesus Christ isn't a corporation, nor does it need a marketing campaign to solicit members. It isn't there to give you something to do. It isn't there so you can "get busy" and try to make God happy with you. God is happy when you are simply who He made you to be and when you share Him genuinely from your own heart and experience. By all means, share Him with people, but forget everything you've been taught about "the proper way to win souls." Flush that nonsense down the toilet. If God moves on your heart to tell someone the Good News of Jesus, then just do that. The coolest thing about trusting the Holy Spirit is that God can take our simplicity and humility and even our nervousness about wanting to say the right thing, and translate it into the perfect words of God that a person needs to hear. It's like we are speaking a foreign language and the Holy Spirit is our interpreter, only He interprets it even better than the way we said it to begin with.

When all that religious pressure comes off and we realize that we are totally free in Jesus, then we can begin to just live freely and trust Him. We don't need to manipulate anybody! This is not some cult that we are trying to suck converts into to load up a crew for the next spaceship coming to get us. This is Christ in us! Imperfect people with real lives and real problems, but a very real and BIG God that we really trust and love and who loves us dearly. You don't have to be religious to have God effectively reveal Himself through you to others. The whole point of the Gospel is that our righteousness is as filthy rags anyway, so Jesus clothes us with His perfection. You can slave all day, every day, to try to be a more religiously devout person, but it won't make you any more effective for God than if you just engage a relationship with Him based in total sincerity. In fact, it may be said that giving your life to religion basically amounts to a form of idolatry because we should only give our lives to God Himself. Some people devote their lives to church more than God and so they have trouble obeying God when He directs them to do things that don't fit their church paradigm.

This is yet another reason why the thing God desires a relationship based in spirit and truth (sincerity), not adherence to a religious routine. One of the biggest complaints non-Christians have of Christians is that they come across as fake, hypocritical or insincere. Christians often talk like they have all the answers to life but they too often prove by their actions that they're often just as screwed up, confused and full of problems. To make
matters worse, rather than simply pointing to Christ as the answer to what ails them, they "witness" by inviting people to church... Ah, the place where religion manifests all its wisdom, emotion, beauty and charm... but never seems to work beyond Sunday afternoon when service lets out.

I remember talking to a family member once, several years ago, about the matter of sharing the Gospel with the people around us, to which this family member replied, "I try to do that... I invite my neighbors to church all the time." I know this person meant well, but it saddened me to realize that this is actually what a lot of Christians have come to believe "sharing the Gospel" is all about; inviting people to church. Sigh... Friends, that has NOTHING to do with the Gospel beyond serving as a cop out to hope that someone else will tell them about Jesus when His very Spirit lives in YOU!

Most church folks realize (at least subconsciously) that, at church, careful attention is given to the emotional aspect of the service. Everything is structured to provoke a certain emotional response. They think that if the music is just right, the sermon perfectly laid out, and the lights appropriately dimmed while the altar is given, this poor sinner will have to find Jesus. Forget about the Holy Spirit... His work really isn't necessary (though you will, of course, never hear anyone admit this). It's the skillfully presented program that does the work. Now think about how many times any of us have ever invited a friend to church only to find that nothing went as we hoped? Have you ever had this happen where, after the service, you find yourself apologizing and saying, "It's not usually like this..."? Why would we say something like that? Isn't it because our hope was in the religious program rather than the Spirit of God to begin with? How many times have we heard people say, "Oh you should try our church... It's nothing like other churches! You're gonna love it. Our pastor is so hip and relevant. He even preaches from a bar stool, while wearing a t-shirt, and drinks coffee from one of our cool church logo mugs." So much hope in the program of religion and yet if you tell someone that all they really need is Jesus, church folks look at you like you crazy.

The truth is, people don't need church! They don't need to "get involved" in a good program. They don't need Bible studies or a video of the church's Christmas pageant. They don't need to experience rockin' modern worship by the latest Jesus band. They don't need a visitor's packet complete with free t-shirt, coffee mug, and a colorful flyer announcing the names of all the staff. They need Christ SIMPLY revealed through YOU!

What people want to see is pure reality... They need to see how we cope through the difficult things in life; How God gives us strength when we are weak and tired... hope when situations are hopeless... a sense of contentment and belonging, even when there are no friends around or when others forsake us and reject us... and they want to see how He gives us sustaining joy, even when there is no reason to be happy about anything. The fact is that God does all of this within the lives of those who are truly submitted to Him - regardless of whether or not "church" is in the mix. It's one of the most wonderful parts of life; discovering how He really walks with us through every situation. Religion only pacifies... it doesn't fulfill. The most sinister thing about it is that it often does more to distract people from reality and actually drowns out the still small voice of God in our lives. People end up uncertain of how to cope without the constant advice of their pastor or the support of church meetings and fellowship events, religious books, conferences, seminars, videos and music. I would dare even say that a lot of Christians may not really even know the Lord, but are still deceived to think they are followers of Jesus just because they attend church and do church stuff. It's a false kind of security and one day it will be a painful awakening for those who were duped into thinking that relationship with God was all about their relationship with the church program.

Matthew 7:21-23 (MSG) - "Knowing the correct password--saying 'Master, Master,' for instance--isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience--doing what my Father wills. I can see it now--at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'"

All of that to say that sincerity should be the core essential to every aspect of our life... especially how we share our faith with others. No one needs a program to help them learn how to most effectively share how much they enjoyed last night's movie. No one needs to attend a special class to learn the best way to convey to friends how great their recent vacation was. And no one needs a leader to instruct them to go out and pick the appropriate restaurant after church. Somehow the words just come to us because they flow from the sincerity and excitement already present within our hearts.

Luke 6:44-45 (BBE) - For every tree is judged by its fruit. Men do not get figs from thorns, or grapes from blackberry plants. The good man, out of the good store of his heart, gives good things; and the evil man, out of his evil store, gives evil: for out of the full store of the heart come the words of the mouth.
Follow Jesus or Follow Your Religion

There is so much more to the Lord than what most people, even church attending folk, have presumed. Religion has largely succeeded in convincing people that what God is generally concerned about is weekly church attendance, giving your money to the church, getting you to pursue some ministry, building grand religious edifices and elaborate "inspirational" programs, or any number of other such things. But friends, there is nothing God is more interested in than to engage in the most intimate, vibrant, abundant, incredible, close and personal relationship with you and to teach you how to have this kind of love for one another! God's desire is to make a Bride ready for His Son! He is interested in teaching us how to function as a body under the Headship of Jesus. This is something very intimate, very much alive, very much organic! God has never been interested in religion, in fact, when Jesus came to earth it was religion that He completely upset! Don't think so? Look at these few examples...

Matthew 21:12-15 - Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants and their customers. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the stalls of those selling doves. He said, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a place of prayer,' but you're turning it into a gathering place for thieves!"" Blind and lame people came to him in the temple courtyard, and he healed them. When the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing miracles he performed and the children shouting in the temple courtyard, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were irritated.

Matthew 15:7-14 - (Jesus said) "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is pointless, because their teachings are rules made by humans.'" Then he called the crowd and said to them, "Listen and try to understand! What goes into a person's mouth doesn't make him unclean. It's what comes out of the mouth that makes a person unclean." Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you realize that when the Pharisees heard your statement they were offended?" He answered, "Any plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. Leave them alone! They are blind leaders. When one blind person leads another, both will fall into the same pit."

John 2:18 - "What right do you have to do these things?" the Jewish leaders demanded. "If you have this authority from God, show us a miraculous sign to prove it."

Mark 3:1-6 - Then he went back in the meeting place where he found a man with a crippled hand. The Pharisees had their eyes on Jesus to see if he would heal him, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath infraction. He said to the man with the crippled hand, "Stand here where we can see you." Then he spoke to the people: "What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless?" No one said a word. He looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious at their hard-nosed religion. He said to the man, "Hold out your hand." He held it out--it was as good as new! The Pharisees got out as fast as they could, sputtering about how they would join forces with Herod's followers and ruin him.

Matthew 23:1-13 - Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. "The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God's Law. You won't go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following them. They talk a good line, but they don't live it. They don't take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. It's all spit-and-polish veneer. Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help. Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called 'Doctor' and 'Reverend.' Don't let people do that to you, put you on a pedestal like that. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. Don't set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let him tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of 'Father'; you have only one Father, and he's in heaven. And don't let people maneuver you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them--Christ. Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you'll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you're content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty. I've had it with you! You're hopeless, you religion scholars, you Pharisees! Frauds! Your lives are roadblocks to God's kingdom. You refuse to enter, and won't let anyone else in either."

It's pretty obvious, from just these few examples, that Jesus didn't mix words when it came to the straight up truth about His kingdom and His people... but it didn't make Him very popular with the leaders of organized religion in His day. It might interest some to consider what has consistently transpired at every major revival in
Church history; religion was upset! From the first century right up through the current revivals of recent years, God moved in unique and amazing ways and the religious system was agitated, offended, repulsed and utterly resistant to change or even the very idea of it - especially when its own livelihood was threatened. The only option was to part with the norm if you wanted to participate in the moving of His Spirit. Those who opted for the Lord's way were often ridiculed, rejected and so often ousted from "fellowship" or at least pressured so severely until they were left with little option but to leave if they expected to have freedom to follow the leading of God's Spirit. When I speak of such people that bore this kind of rejection from men, don't be so quick to presume I am just talking about "laypeople." For there have certainly been those we might classify as "church leaders" that took a stand for truth and they were also rejected by traditional thinking religious folk.

Most every mainstream revival in Church history, as I have studied it, flourished outside of organized religion because organized religion would not allow it. Organized religion would have nothing to do with anything it could not control (much less anything it could not take credit for inventing). Even in the few cases where revival movements were invited inside the walls, it wasn't long before the walls closed in on that movement to attempt control of it. So it was true then and so it is today! I have also noticed that in virtually every revival there was a common occurrence; nothing was business as usual... until... man grabbed the reigns and tried to "box up" the move of God again. Guess what happened? It fizzled out! It always died! The power of God's manifested presence lifted, and what was left each time were dry, lifeless rituals, denominations and routine programs. For more information about the 2,000 year history of Christians that have stood outside the Protestant-Catholic tradition (i.e. organized religion) and walked in vibrant relationship with Christ, there's a cool little book called The Torch of the Testimony by John W. Kennedy.

### Religion Squeezes Out Life

When I speak of those who "grabbed the reigns" of course you might presume I am referring to leaders in the church. Most often (quite honestly) this has been the case (since the whole "clergy/laity" concept is what the Institutional Church is structured around), however, there have been those in positions of church leadership who believed they were honestly aiding the Holy Spirit and following His will. When they stepped out to boldly follow the leading of Lord, God used them and believers were blessed. When the revival dried up, they wept over it and did not understand why it died. Their hearts were sorrowful. They could not perceive themselves or the institutional system as having become an obstacle to the moving of God's Spirit. God is so loving and merciful to our unrighteousness and gives grace in our failings. Even when religion replaced the flow of the Spirit on so many occasions throughout history and even today, God has still reached out and called to His own, "I'm still here, longing for you. Come away with Me. I love you. Leave this machine behind and abandon your hearts unto Me." So many of us have been guilty of shutting Him out because of our desire to do things the way we think they ought to be done. And so, God has grace, but He does so often lift the manifestation of His presence in our midst and if we continue to neglect Him, His blessing departs altogether and we our left to our own religious devices. This has happened time and again throughout history. Religion has tried to manipulate the moving of God's Spirit and God's Spirit cannot be manipulated or shoved in a box. So the delusion saturates all who embrace this "other thing" and not Christ alone. Men become so enamored with their programs that they are all but oblivious to the true moving of God's Spirit. It is a grievous thing.

So revival dies, often because men love to take control in an effort to maintain an experience or what that experience gained them (or at the very least have misunderstood God's intentions from the outset as it concerns how the body of Christ is to meet and walk together). I'm not sure I could conclude that all "church leaders" have some sort of "evil agenda" to control people or to manufacture a counterfeit spirituality. In fact, I would rather presume, more often than not, that many of their intentions are sincere and merely a human response to a very real encounter with God (hence also the reason we see examples of so many men of God who seems to have started out humbly and with a right heart, but who later fell into deception and full-on bondage to the dictates of organized religion). We all lose sight sometimes. Even Jesus' own disciples did. Remember when Jesus was magnificently transfigured on the mount before Peter, James and John? It is incredibly significant that we recall Peter's sudden reaction to this amazing event. I don't think there would be any fault in acknowledging that Peter's first remark was understandable indeed. He said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." I can tell you just as easily that, even if I didn't say it (after having witnessed what they witnessed), I would have felt the same way! It is no surprise to me either that in moments of great revival that men would remark, in a similar way, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" But Peter's next comment, is interesting (Matthew 17:4): " if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." There it is! The same excitement to place the Glory of God in a box, which has struck so many well-meaning pastors today. Peter might as well had said, "Lord, let me build three churches right here... one after You and two more after these other prominent leaders in your kingdom."

We must also note the immediate response of God the Father at Peter's excited remarks (vs.5). "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" The disciples all fell to the ground in fear. God's interest
was not in three temples (NOT EVEN A TEMPLE DEDICATED FOR JESUS), but that they simply follow Jesus; in whom all things are summed up completely! Peter and the other disciples were afraid when they heard the voice redirecting their focus (Peter undoubtedly realizing that he had just shoved his foot all the way inside his religious mouth as far as it would go), but Jesus gently touched them and said, "do not be afraid," and the Scripture says that they arose and saw no one but Jesus only. To me this shows the understanding, merciful nature of God to our human propensity to this kind of reaction - yet, at the same time, His most serious call to recognize the truth and follow. Would to God that, like the disciples, we would open our eyes at this revelation and SEE JESUS ONLY - rather than keep pursuing all the stuff of religion. Religion only bears a form of godliness, but it squeezes out the real life that only Christ affords! Religion always seems good to man, but God doesn't live in a box - no matter how nice of a box man builds for Him. Peter meant well. He was excited and he wanted to hold on to that good thing his eyes beheld. The funny thing was, Peter didn't even really understand what he had just seen because his reaction was so far out of God's will! His religious presumption distracted him from actual truth!

I do love this story because it shows me that there are well-intentioned men of God, like Peter, who truly do love God and want to honor Him completely - but who also get severely sidetracked sometimes. Unfortunately, there are far too many folks like Peter today who have yet to heed the Father's reply of, "this is My beloved Son, hear Him!" and they continue on with their building of tabernacles to honor Him; trying to capture in four walls with a program and routine what happened once before when the wind of His Spirit touched them.

I submit to you that I do believe God sometimes sends revival... but not for the purpose of livening up church meetings, making people feel good, strengthening programs or validating church building projects. He does it to awaken the souls of men from their spiritual slumber and restore sight to religion-bound blinded eyes. In His mercy He reveals Himself and lavishes them with the realization that, yes, God is here among us. Yes, He loves us. Yes, He longs to engage the most intimate relationship with us. Some hear and respond. Others sincerely enjoy the moment, but return again to their program when the excitement dies. And still others make opportunity of the moment (like Peter's incorrect reaction), to build another church, emphasize another religious program, and place (or try to maintain) the move of the Spirit into four walls. Sigh...

### Disconnecting From Religion

Sadly, what men often intend for good, becomes something most contrary to the flow of God's Spirit and often quite oppressive. Many times there is a very small remnant that strives to continue in their pursuit of God's Spirit and their willingness to lay aside tradition for the sake of following Christ, but they are rarely accepted by the larger institutions or thought to be of any real significance. So often they have been misunderstood. Sometimes they are looked upon derogatorily and thought to be misguided, of base, un-submitting to authority or even deceived - all because they have chosen to disconnect from religion (though not from Christ). If they are vocal at all about what they believe, they are sometimes labeled as being dissenters, rebels, radicals, wounded and bitter saints, trouble-makers, etc. Often, those who remain dissatisfied with the routine and want to follow the Master with abandon, find they must meet outside or draw together in some other fashion apart from the weekly program. I have not only witnessed these things, but sadly I have (in the past) been one of the railers and accusers of these kinds of people. I have also, due to my current perspectives on the Christian life, suffered some of these same criticisms by other Christians... You might even be one of them.

As just a quick side note here, I wish to express something about the issue of people who find ways of meeting together outside of traditional organized religion (which can be entirely a good thing). I receive a good number of e-mails from people who presume that my intention with this site is to glorify and promote the "house church" movement in place of institutional churches. That has never been the aim of this website and neither am I currently involved in anything one would consider to be a "house church." While there are aspects of the informal house meeting that are understandably more attractive and far more inviting (and biblical) than institutionalized styles of meeting (primarily because of the simple, open forum, family-style environment), I do not promote any specific style because I think this is missing the point altogether. Fellowship in the body of Christ is not dependent upon organizing religious meetings (whether in a home or a church building). To make "meetings" the issue is to place something at the center besides Christ and to make having church in a house the focus is no different that making a church building the focus. I am not suggesting substitutes or alternatives for "church" here, because the only thing essential is Christ. If we are His, we are part of His body and members TOGETHER of Him. Our fellowship resides IN HIM, whether or not we meet on a regular basis. HE is our Fellowship! We are JOINED TO HIM and, therefore, members of ONE BODY! This is the essential revelation! And while the early Christians indeed, most frequently, met in homes for fellowship, worship and to edify one another, I do not believe this was some formally prescribed method. It was simply Christians desiring to draw together because of the fellowship that already existed among them because of Christ. God's purpose is to reveal His Son through His people on this earth - THAT is really what the Church is; Christ manifested (through His body)! And I can tell you, from my own studies, I believe it looked far different that most anything we might consider a "church" today. They weren't concerned with erecting temples and formalizing programs and music
ministries. They were simply content to live for Jesus and share His life sincerely with one another. Christianity is about Christ - not the organization of religion - in any form. If a person chooses to meet with other Christians in a home or a church on a consistent or irregular basis, I leave that up to each individual's choice.

Sometimes, I'll be honest with you, it's hard to remember to walk in forgiveness when people inflict wounds, but that is the way of the cross of Christ. If we do not allow the Lord to crucify us daily, the wounds inflicted by others will become festering sores and bitterness will take root in the soil of our hearts. Bitterness and a critical attitude will kill the flow of the Spirit in our lives. When others don't understand, we must forgive and just continue to follow Jesus and pray for them. Those of us who are experiencing the Lord opening our eyes to things, we can certainly voice those things and do our part to shine the light so others can see, but we also have to realize that we were once blind ourselves (and still are in other areas), and God is able to remove the blinders! Praise God!

I share that just to let you know I am not bitter towards those who disagree with me on subjects like this. Certainly some think I just have a bone to pick with the organized church; that I'm only trying to find things wrong because I have been hurt in some way or that I'm trying to lash back in anger because of personal disappointments, perceived rejection or disagreements on doctrine. Some think that I have allowed (or am allowing) my heart to become hard because I no longer embrace all the traditional routine practices of organized, institutional religion. They assume that I am a deceived individual that has believed a different gospel, simply because they presume that traditional church life is equal to the Gospel of Scripture. That might sound a bit ridiculous but if you were to see some of the mail I've received that accuse me of believing a different gospel all because I do not endorse all of the traditional religious concepts that dominate Christian behavior today and are deemed as essential, you would see that it appears all too clear that people do tend to associate tradition (i.e. organized religion) with the Gospel (or at least equate its importance with it), even though many of these traditions are not even biblical. (sigh)

It is sad to find so much ignorance among those who make such harsh accusations about me and others who have walked in similar paths as myself (and, even more, it amazes me how those who like to boast they believe the Bible 100% are not the least bit concerned that more than 95% of our modern Institutional Church practices have literally no foundation in the Scripture whatsoever and some of them even fight against the pattern and direction of Scripture and the message of the Gospel). It is also sad that rarely have any of these people made an honest effort to befriend me, converse peaceably with me, inquire and discuss anything with me in a spirit of meekness with sincere and humble hearts, before casting their assumptions and accusations. I can do nothing about those who draw the conclusions they do. I can only pray that God will forgive, show mercy, open the eyes of their heart and let them see. I can also pray that God will keep me humble as well, teachable, and walking in love.

Believe me, that's not an easy order to fill and it's only by the power of Christ that I even come close to hitting the mark on any given day (grin). There have been plenty of times I would have preferred to give a religious brother a good thrashing. :) My emotions and my knowledge often provoke me to want to contend with anything that seems to set itself against it. Pride is often waiting at the door with its finger on the button. But I know God has been so incredibly patient with me, even through all my own seasons of ignorance and foolishness. How can I hold this against a brother who does not yet see what I see? It's even harder when I sometimes find that a brother whom I thought was "less clued in" than I gave him credit for, actually has some insights that were taught to him by the Holy Spirit and that God wants to speak into my life as well.

Let me tell you, this business of getting along in the Family is sometimes the hardest thing of all... Especially when it starts becoming clear to us that there is a bold difference between modern day "churchianity" and true Christianity as the Bible presents it. When the lines become more clearly evident to us and the Holy Spirit begins to reveal to us the difference between our Lord's kingdom and the kingdoms of men (which I believe He is calling us to come out of), the temptation to settle into an "us vs. them" mindset is incredibly strong (and most of us probably know a few people that have gone down that road to a bitter extreme). Often there is this sense of conflict we battle inside; on the one hand our eyes are being filled with the truth and a sincere disgust for compromise, but on the other hand we know that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ truly do love God but just don't see the same things at this time and we battle the question as to how we are supposed to interact with the body of Christ with this great divide between our present theologies. Some of you reading this know what I'm talking about and you know that it's much easier to talk about grace than to walk in it. :) Unfortunately, while I know that the Lord is teaching me how to grow in grace, I don't have a clear answer for you here. But that's what's so great about this walk outside of "religion". We are free to be honest about the fact that we are working out these kinds of struggles in our lives and God is really teaching us through them; making us aware of the truth and helping us grow (even if it's painful for a season) until we look more like Jesus than we did the day before... and the best part is, it's not a "Sunday smile" kind of Christian facade, but the Holy Spirit fruits are being grown, sincerely grown, in the soil of our hearts.

While I'm sure someone will find a flaw with this parallel, I have sometimes thought that the story of the prodigal
son is a lot more similar to how Christians relate in the Family of God than it is a picture of a lost person being found. While it is the latter as well (and while I understand what Jesus was literally saying to the Jews through this story), we should remember (more simply) that the story is about a father who had two sons. They were both already in the family together. If you will allow my own parallel here, I often think the prodigal may suit some of us who have spent our years playing around with religion. It seemed that suddenly, all at once, we found ourselves with nothing substantial in that environment. And we looked around us and found ourselves in the presence of "pigs" (the stench of religion). We also realized (at least many of us did) that the deception we found ourselves in was not without our own approval. It was us who strayed from the truth to embrace what seemed wise in our own assessment. We bought the myth of churchianity just as much as anyone else. And despite the fact that we had some high times, we still found ourselves at the end of ourselves, wanting of truth - desperate for reality. In sorrow, discouragement, confusion, and ultimately humility (whether because we had become so broken due to our "harlotry" in religion or because we finally heard the call of Jesus to come out of that former mentality), we left that old lifestyle and threw ourselves on the Father's mercy and it was then we discovered that not only does He welcome us, but He had been waiting all along for us. He runs to us and lavishes all of His blessing upon us.

That's often the way I see what happened with me in coming out of the mindset of churchianity. It was a most humiliating thing to acknowledge that, myself, who had been a fully active participant in "church world" for more than 30 years and who thought I knew God intimately and was a pretty spiritual guy, could find myself utterly discontented with "church" life any longer. For me, it was also (I believe) an answering of the call of God on my life. I do believe He called me out of that system. But it would be putting too much pride in myself to say my leaving was simply obedience. I thank God that He called and I am glad I eventually listened, but it wasn't so perfectly acted out as all that. It was a long and painful process; wrought with months of questions, tears and confusion as to what God was really up to in me. I yielded, but it was not always an easy yielding. It's still not always easy. Nevertheless, God, like the father of the prodigal, ran to me and embraced me and lavished all of His goodness upon me. For a time, it was as though the devil tried to convince me that the Father's call to "come home" meant that maybe I was supposed to go back to church and so this was actually the first thing I explored after I left it behind. But once my eyes were opened, I could never find comfort in those walls again... I wasn't "home" at all. I discovered that "coming home" wasn't about "going back to church" but was about simply running into my Father's arms! Home is where HIS heart is and nothing else will satisfy.

I am also blessed to tell you that NONE of the threats people made to me about what would happen if I left the church system came to pass! However, I expect that there are even some who still presume I must not be following Christ or have any relationship with Him simply because of the fact that they do not see my body plopped down into a pew week after week. But I am glad to prove the theories wrong! Jesus is Lord! Yes there have been changes in my life since leaving, but not for the worse. I am finally learning to grow and stand on my own two feet on a sure foundation... Not the foundation of church. Not the foundation of submitting to a religious hierarchy. Not the foundation of trying to live up to rules, formulas and principles. But the only foundation there is - CHRIST JESUS!!!! Please, if you are one who has made the bold decision to disconnect yourself from the traditional "church" mindset (and by that I do not necessarily mean that you may have even formally "left" a church yet - I'm just talking about the revelation of truth that Christ's Church is a body not a building or weekly program), then I pray you will not grow impatient with the Lord's process of change He desires to work in you. There will be a lot of pressure to conform to traditional things. There may be some frustrating trials you will have to endure as your mindsets begin to change. You might start to grow weary and slide back to old mindsets. Stand strong! Have faith in God! You will come through the other side I promise!

I truly hope this is encouraging some of you who may be able to relate to this testimony. God's goodness most definitely extends beyond the four walls of religious organization (and especially the mindset of "churchianity" in particular)! Sometimes though, we still have some "elder brothers" who aren't diggin' the Father's response to us (let alone our receiving of His response). They are confused by it and they are angry that the Father would bless us when we have done nothing to deserve His blessing. One thing I love about the story of the prodigal son is that the Father did not only pay attention to the son who came home, but he went out to the elder son as well, who was also in error (though his pride blinded him to it), and the father pleaded with elder son to also come into the house and celebrate. Think of this! How humiliating for the older son to come in and join a celebration with a brother he despises because he doesn't think the brother deserves the father's love and abundant blessing. And this is what is so cool about this story to me; BOTH BROTHERS WERE IN ERROR AND THE FATHER HAD TO LOVINGLY CORRECT THEM BOTH. There is no cause for boasting on either side of things here. Both sons had an incorrect perception of how things operate in the family; they both looked at things in terms of duty, being a hired servant, following a prescribed order - but the father reminded them that they were SONS and that every good thing of His belonged to them both. Both were outside the house and both were called in to the celebration. Again, the Father's House is NOT "the church building"... It is His Family. It is that place of divine, spiritual fellowship with Him. And somehow, us prodigals and us elder brothers have to learn to get along. I just pray that we can finally come to discern the true body of Christ together and stop throwing obstacles in the way of fellowship.

Real Christianity is NOT Religion!
Christianity is NOT religion! As I said before, it may not look too polished during the process of growth in life (and we may have to endure some insults and unfair criticism by our "elder brothers" who don't like the fact that our Father pours out His lavish blessing upon repentant prodigals), but it's real growth and it's real intimacy with Him! Praise God!! And may God continue to plead with our elder brothers. We are part of the same Family, but it's going to take a lot more humility and love to pull us closer together than we stand today. Once you've tasted reality though, it can make it absolutely unbearable to live with your conscience if you get weary and go back to the "program." So be warned! If you're new to this walk outside the comfortable walls of religious organization, it will ruin you for life... but I promise you, it's the best "ruin" anyone could hope for, because it's the way of truth and it means you stand dependent upon His leading and you will not miss His moving! Never again will you be able to buy the myth that religious churchianity is a legitimate substitute for life in Him. Until you die, this truth will be boldly evident before your eyes and you will not be able to pretend ignorance again. What's that mean? It means, your gonna have to learn how to walk the Christian walk in real shoe leather. Sunday meetings, while not wrong in and of themselves, will no longer be enough to sustain you (in fact, you may find - as I did - that they bore you supremely). Even harder is the path of trying to find out how to connect with your family in Christ without the obstacle of church getting in the way. This is a hard one, but my advice is to not push it. Let God draw together those He wants you to walk with. He will bring the appropriate members of the Family into your life on His time table. Don't get ahead of Him. Don't buy into the pressure that "you're out of fellowship" and you need to get into some kind of meeting setup so as not to "forsake the assembling". Remember, even when you are not physically in the company of other Christians you are still part of the Assembly, for there is only ONE BODY of Christ. Trust the Lord. Learn patience and watch what God will do. It may take months or even a couple years, but when it happens as God designs it to you will look back in amazement and you will be so glad you did not get ahead of His leading. Be encouraged!!

On occasion people will say (hearing all of this testimony), "your perspectives on Christianity are rather new aren't they Dave?" The presumption continues: "Obviously Dave, after being so supportive of the institutional church organization for 30 years and then leaving, shows that you only left because of hurts and your new revelations must be founded upon those wounds." Friends, this kind of reason really strikes me as just ridiculous. Why? Well, think about it this way: Because a person comes to a conclusion (personal revelation) that is "new" does not make that conclusion invalid. Neither does it mean that conclusion is invalid because it potentially came about through painful circumstances. Let me explain it this way. If, for example, I was to have believed for 30 years that Jesus didn't really love me and then one day (after enduring some painful hardship) a light came on in my heart and I realized I had perceived things wrong and that Jesus did love me (and that revelation changed everything about my life and perspective on things), would that suddenly mean that my "new" revelation is false merely because it is "new" to me or because it was through some painful experience that it was brought to light? Of course not. The truth is the truth, whether it's new to me or not; whether this is "new" revelation is false merely because it is "new" to me or because it was through some painful experience that it was brought to light? Of course not. The truth is the truth, whether it's new to me or not; whether this is the first time I am awaking to it or not. Why do Christians always seem to presume that hurt is the foundation of anything separate from the traditional status quo? Why do we not instead presume that God sometimes uses difficult events in our lives to shape our character, humble us, wake us up, mature us, and move us into reality? Look at what the Scripture teaches us about hardship... Like grandma used to say, "it's good for you!"

**Romans 5:3-5** - Not only this, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope: and hope doesn't disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

**1 Peter 4:12-14** - Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world. Be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you.

**James 1:2-5** - Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way. If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it.

**Psalm 31:9-16** - Be kind to me, GOD-- I'm in deep, deep trouble again. I've cried my eyes out; I feel hollow inside.0 My life leaks away, groan by groan; my years fade out in sighs. My troubles have worn me out, turned my bones to powder. To my enemies I'm a monster; I'm ridiculed by the neighbors. My friends are horrified; they cross the street to avoid me. They want to blot me from memory, forget me like a corpse in a grave, discard me like a broken dish in the trash. The street-talk gossip has me "criminally insane!" Behind locked doors they plot how to ruin me for good. Desperate, I throw myself on you: you are my God! Hour by hour I place my days in your hand, safe from the hands out to get me. Warm me, your
servant, with a smile; save me because you love me.

Job 12:1-11 - Job answered (his religious friend Zophar): "I'm sure you speak for all the experts, and when you die there'll be no one left to tell us how to live. But don't forget that I also have a brain-- I don't intend to play second fiddle to you. It doesn't take an expert to know these things. I'm ridiculed by my friends: 'So that's the man who had conversations with God!' Ridiculed without mercy: 'Look at the man who never did wrong!' It's easy for the well-to-do to point their fingers in blame, for the well-fixed to pour scorn on the strugglers. Crooks reside safely in high-security houses, insolent blasphemers live in luxury; they've bought and paid for a god who'll protect them. But ask the animals what they think--let them teach you; let the birds tell you what's going on. Put your ear to the earth--learn the basics. Listen--the fish in the ocean will tell you their stories. Isn't it clear that they all know and agree that GOD is sovereign, that he holds all things in his hand - Every living soul, yes, every breathing creature? Isn't this all just common sense, as common as the sense of taste?"

1 Peter 1:6-7 - So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold--and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

While it does often hurt to have people say difficult, untrue and harsh things about you, the way I see it is that we can either let these things make us grow bitter or we can go to the cross of Jesus, learn to walk in greater grace and forgiveness, and allow the Spirit of the Lord to work change in our hearts and keep moving us ahead. That is my desire anyway. To be honest, I don't always pass the test here, but my heart is to remain pliable and teachable by the Lord through every circumstance I encounter.

I do believe there is going to be an increasing amount of persecution for those who decide in this day to not go along with the flow but rather commit all to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. When so many Christians today have become convinced (through religious persuasion) that the Institutional Church has a biblical right to exist and is essential to spiritual growth, it is only obvious that anyone who disagrees will be viewed as a backsliding, deceived individual. If you cannot identify the name of some institutional church you belong to, you will likely be automatically written off as a person who is less than a brother or sister in Christ (because, as the assumption goes, there is just no way a non-church attender can have an intimate relationship with Jesus or any shred of spiritual maturity or flow in any spiritual gift or ministry outside of "the four walls"). In fact, I know of preachers (who have titled themselves as apostles) who have stood before congregations and declared that if a person doesn't attend a church and is submitted to some pastor, that person cannot be a son of God! This statement was actually made by a preacher at a special service in the church I used to attend, which was set up to highlight the importance of so-called "spiritual fathers"! Our call as sincere followers of Jesus is not to just try to go along with what's popular in religion for the sake of getting along. We're not to be men-pleasers. We need to clothe ourselves in the truth. We should love those who reject and ridicule us, but we must stand for truth ALWAYS.

Luke 6:26 - There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests--look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

But, even recognizing all of this, I know that some people will continue to believe and preach what they will and the business of Churchianity will go on. Some will continue to forget about mercy as they criticize, ostracize and rebuke those who oppose their perception of religion and others will continue to neglect to have any willingness to consider the possibility that they may have grabbed a hold of something slighted, dangerous or spiritually unhealthy. Mind you I am talking about how people perceive religion individually, when they equate it on a level of importance with Scripture (even the Gospel of Jesus) and how these perceptions of religion can divide and tear apart relationships. Would that I did not have to acknowledge such a real problem that exists among so many of those who call themselves by Christ's name. I would so much rather talk only about the important stuff that should pull us together; the Gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Actually, I am also talking about that. In fact, that is really the main emphasis here. If we believers could stick to that, I think it would move us a long ways beyond where we are at this point in time now. But Christians rarely communicate wholly on that level. When the issue of church attendance comes up, often that is the dividing line of fellowship and even if two people were to have three hours of wonderful fellowship in the Lord, there is one phrase that has the power to destroy the whole thing; "what church do you attend?" From this point on it is (many times) life or death for the relationship. If a believer dares utter the words, "I don't attend a church," it could be curtains for the exchange of brotherly love and there may never be seen again the kind of love and fellowship that was manifested before that question ever arose.
I can't tell you how many Christian folk (even good friends) I have talked to about some of these things and how defensive they are, how resistant to even consider the possibility that there could be error in the traditional concept of church. They won't even look at the issue. They won't even consider the Scripture. They just live on their presumption and willful ignorance that anything could be wrong at all. Sometimes it's worse than mere blindness, it is a blindness where the blind have no desire to be cured or even see if there is some truth to what another is trying to warn them of and so they remain doubly blind. Even despite all that could be shared to show how biblically there must be another way that is not akin to what is common today (a way that encourages our dependency upon and obedience to Christ alone), some will still accuse others, thinking they are doing God's service even in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. They will even cut themselves off from a friend. Some do this from ignorance and sincerity (I used to as well), some may actually be deceivers who know what they are preaching is a lie against the Word of God. I don't know about all of them. God sees the hearts and He will be the judge of all. Ours is to pray and forgive but still to separate ourselves from the error without shame. God knows our hearts.

While I may not be able to do much about people and their critical opinions of me and those like me, I can pray that God will allow these words to touch the people that need to hear it and that He, not I, will work by His Spirit in speaking what He desires to their hearts. I will tell you how encouraged I have been to even receive letters from pastors (and former pastors), ministers and many Christian brothers and sisters from all walks of life who have been able to relate to many of the things I have shared here. I have been blessed to receive comfort and encouragement by other sincere believers who have shared their experiences and what God has taught them through the trials and circumstances they each have endured. God is so amazing! I am so blessed to be a part of the body of Christ!

**Killing The Move of God's Spirit**

Perhaps I do have somewhat of a bone to pick with "the church"; but the bone is with that religious system of man that has only called itself by the title "church." I am interested in what God's Word says about His Church. Anything apart from that I cannot endorse. I see no need to try and "live with it" because, according to Jesus, there is only one house of living stones called the Church and it has nothing to do with that house built by man (where Jesus does not dwell - Acts 7:48-49; 17:24). I grew up in the Institutional Church. I am not ignorant about the things I talk about. I've seen the good, the bad and the ugly. I've seen it use the name of Jesus (and manipulate Scripture) to entice people to donate their money for its maintenance and I've watched it resist, time and again, the moving of God's Spirit. I've experienced its insensitivity to His voice. I've heard its proponents declare falsely it is "the house of the Lord". I've seen it emphasize the form, the ritual and the appearance of godliness while squelching out liberty in the Spirit and sincerity among God's people. I've seen it glory in types and shadows and care nothing for what is real and alive. I've seen religious concepts and programming kill a revival!

When the Spirit of the Lord moved powerfully in the prayer meetings of my own home that lasted for nearly 5 years, I watched religious order kill it entirely! I was ignorant then. I allowed "structure" to take the place of what was functioning beautifully by the simple direction of the Holy Spirit and I saw a move of God die out totally in less than six months. Six months! None of us who embraced the form meant to kill the move of God's Spirit. We believed this would aid Him. We really wanted to move ahead and follow Him. We believed it was the wise thing to do. But truly the Scriptures say so well how man's wisdom is but foolishness to God. Our wisdom had an appearance of good and it even contained some things that were good, but our taking control and my own insensitivity to the Holy Spirit and failure to trust Him completely caused something wonderful that He was orchestrating all along to die.

Friends, I know what I am talking about! I've watched men pray (and even uttered prayers myself) asking God to come and have His way in our services, while as soon as the Amen is said we go right on about our routine program and our human-inspired agendas. I've attended church services all over the place, even in other countries and have friends in many other parts of the world and I know that virtually every Christian church service on the face of the earth is exactly the same boring, static routine! Whether a person is Baptist or Charismatic, Chinese or American it doesn't matter. The routine is essentially the same. But the routine is not found in the Scriptures and yet it is held every bit as important as the Gospel of Jesus - numbing people's minds from the passion to submit themselves as devoted disciples of Jesus and making them servants of religion where emotional manipulation and twisted teaching has convinced them that participating in church activities is what makes them spiritual, valuable to God and to the body of Christ.

Yes, I have seen what religion does to sincere believers who have hearts for the Lord. I have seen sincere people who experience the voice of God speaking to them walk away in discouragement because someone in leadership told them they did not really hear from God because that leader couldn't confirm it. I have seen people become inspired with an evangelistic vision, only to have a board of elders "sit on it" for six months until it's forgotten and all the zeal has been drained out of that saint. I've seen Christians ostracized, rejected and
criticized because their convictions about something didn't match the church's list of opinions and programs. I have seen Christians start to experience their eyes opening to things that need to change (even matched with the zeal and heart to work towards that change), only to have leaders and other Christians tell them they are the one with the real problem and come back with answers like, "hey, there's no perfect church, and even if there was it would cease to be perfect once you are there." So Christians settle for less because it seems that's the best that can be expected. I could go on and on. Perhaps you could add your experience to the list as well. Simply put, religion kills the moving of God's Spirit in the Church. Quite honestly, I am sick of it. I think the Lord is sick of it! Organized religion arrogantly presumes itself to be most significant. It thinks that God still needs a principle mediator between Himself and His people but then it doesn't even do that much! It invents its own agenda and message. Even though it deviates time and again from the true words of God, it presents itself authoritatively as His mouthpiece. Ignorant followers believe her and think they are following God because they are joined with her, and they fear her if they neglect to do what she commands.

I will dare suggest to you that if the Institutional Church in our time does see another revival or awakening (due to God's rich grace and mercy for those Saints whom He so dearly loves that remain on the inside), it will be just a matter of time before it too dies. I believe it's inevitable because the program will kill it every time. It has happened this way for 1,700+ years. Until men get their hands off the move of God's Spirit and let Christ be Head of HIS body (not to mention stop thinking that His body is represented by a "church building"), it will always die and things will always return to business as usual for those who are a part of "the form!"

My sincere prayer is that the Church (the body of Christ) will awake and not permit themselves to find contentment with religious routine any longer! We must repent of our religiosity and turn from OUR wicked ways, even the ways of religious good intentions. And if the institutions we have routinely participated in remain resistant to this radical transformation, then we must tune our ears to the Spirit of the Lord and see whether He is calling us out of that system that chooses to remain stiff-necked and stubbornly opposed to the move of the Spirit. But again, I repeat, we must hear from the Lord in making such a decision. It is possible that God has called some to remain within for a time. Perhaps for the benefit of someone else, or perhaps to teach us something.

We must also remember that, if we do leave, we should not manifest some kind of attitude that proudly elevates "us" over "them" in our thinking and our manner of speaking. This is a point that I really feel the need to stress because a lot of people fall for this. While those who refuse to follow Jesus and stubbornly hold fast to their religion are, in a sense, become "spiritual enemies" of the truth that we should not allow ourselves to be infected by their obviously corrupted mindset, they are NOT our natural enemies. God loves them no less and desires to open their eyes to truth just as He did for us. So, yes, a separation exists - but it should not cause us to act unlovingly or arrogantly towards others who are yet swayed by a different mindset.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (LITV) - Do not be led astray; bad companionships ruin good habits.

3 John 1:11 (NLT) - Dear friend, don't let this bad example influence you. Follow only what is good. Remember that those who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God.

1 John 2:26-29 (GW) - I'm writing to you about those who are trying to deceive you. The anointing you received from Christ lives in you. You don't need anyone to teach you something else. Instead, Christ's anointing teaches you about everything. His anointing is true and contains no lie. So live in Christ as he taught you to do. Now, dear children, live in Christ. Then, when he appears we will have confidence, and when he comes we won't turn from him in shame. If you know that Christ has God's approval, you also know that everyone who does what God approves of has been born from God.

Remember, there are people in those institutions who are genuinely born of God and are just as much our brothers and sisters in Christ as those who may have chosen to remove themselves from the institutional system. If we develop an us vs. them mentality on the basis of church attendance alone, then we are making the same mistake of those who place that organization at the center of their spiritual lives! Christ is supposed to be the center of godly relationships, not church attendance. If you can connect with a brother or sister in Christ who is willing to do so on the basis of a mutual relationship in Jesus, then why allow yourself to be offended at their church attendance? Perhaps you don't know what God is doing in them or speaking to them. I realize this is sometimes hard to live out, especially when we have been so abused by organized religion. Thank God for His grace!

Prayer and brotherly love must continue. Those of us outside are not "better" or necessarily "more spiritual" than many of those still within. Our decision to leave is primarily one of conscience, the leading of the Holy Spirit, a desire to walk in obedience to the Word of God and, truly, a passion for something more than simply religion and form; something real and alive, organic and free, spiritually impacting, and yet informal and fitting
No Further Regard For "The System", But Every Regard For Christ

The big difference between, say, my perspective of "church" and probably most of those within the institutional system is that I do not view the "system" as anything significant at all where the Christian life is concerned. This point is too often confused, even many times by those who have removed themselves from the institutional system and transferred themselves into weekly house church meetings. My understanding of "church" is not a building or a program (whether in a large auditorium or in a home), but the Ekklesia (the original Greek word for "church" in Scripture) - the people of God who ARE HIS VERY BODY. It's not just a matter of "people gathering", though the Church is the Lord's "assembly", but it is a gathering unto Him and He being manifested through them! The Church is not JUST people... The Church is Christ; His body! Such can never be described in terms of a religious program and building. That is why I am able to separate from the "weekly program" (if you will) and not see myself in any way separate from the Church of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Church, His Tabernacle, His body, is people - not structures and religious programs.

This is an important distinction, yes a biblical distinction indeed, and why I say that even some of those that have separated themselves from traditional meeting styles have erred; because they wrongly presume that it is "the structure" itself that is significant (i.e. from church building to house and home - the meeting format which remains virtually the same). If this distinction that I am referring to is understood and kept in focus then the heart here will be clearly understood and not mistranslated.

Again, I reiterate that my disregard for "church" is not the Church of Scripture; the called out, and most royal, assembly of God in Christ Jesus - rather it is a disregard for the institutional system; a system that was not established in the New Covenant but is wrought from the very invention of men (most of its practices having been translated directly from pagan tradition and only Christianized throughout history)! It is that institution and very concepts that fuel its existence (that I believe places itself as a mediator between God and man and cripples true spiritual growth) that I detest, not those precious saints that are gathered within its walls for whatever reason it may be they are gathered (and I will not presume every reason). And while I am personally more encouraged by the concept of meeting in a home informally, and at least finding this example in Scripture, I also know that many times house churches fall into the same trap as the larger institutional churches. So the "meeting" or the "location" and "structure" that meeting takes place is not what is central and to be focused upon, but Christ alone and the corporate participation of the body! If Christ remains central and the body is free to be collectively active and sincerely manifested, not the traditions and order of men, then He will be glorified in our assembling (whether it transpires in a home with two people or ten, a large building, in an Internet chat room, e-mail, telephone, a letter, or driving down the carpool lane of the highway). The encouragement from the Word of God (Hebrews 10:24-25) to keep assembling together speaks nothing of a weekly ritual called "attending church." It says nothing about finding a good pastor to submit to, a program to plug into, a choir to sing in, or any other religious activity. It merely references an exhortation to keep fellowship with one another as the days grow more difficult and we need the encouragement of one another.

So, while my statements about institutional Christianity are often strong (and I intend to spur Christians to think outside the box and really allow a greater hunger for truth and reality to grow - leaving religiosity behind), please do not take what I am saying here as being words of bitterness towards other Christians or presume I am just telling people to necessarily leave their churches (assemblies), separate from other believers or start thinking that their pastor is an evil person. True, I have strong opinions about organized religion and the activities so many people regard as being "spiritual" and "biblical", but my intention is not to motivate anyone to start throwing bricks at their pastors or leave a church just to show their contempt for something they disagree with. My heart is to spur believers towards the things that are essential and flee the things that are not. Religion is not essential... But Christ Jesus is! Please don't get hung up on my disgruntlement with "the routine" but realize that it is what the dependence on that routine has produced is not good fruit and it has crippled the body of Christ.

Though I challenge the modern professional pastoral role, I am not against pastors. I believe the Bible when it says that God gave some to be pastors. Many "pastors" (speaking of the traditional definition of the role) are wonderful people; sincere Christians who truly love God's people and desire to serve them, encourage them, bless them and help them grow. There are even some (I can count them on one hand) that I personally would regard as pastors in my own life; who have truly shepherded me in a way that only encouraged my dependence upon Christ. I know there are pastors who, for the most part, are just as frustrated with traditional churchianity as I am. I know there are pastors that do not crave the limelight and who do not wish to exercise authoritarian concepts of leadership over others. Some may read this and honestly agree with much of what I am sharing, understanding the focus which I am targeting - which is not the person directly, but the profession that is often the distraction.

I know there are men who wear the title of pastor (right or wrong) that truly want to see God's people grow up in
the Lord, becoming dependent upon Him and relationally submitted to one another in love. I believe God raises up men and women of spiritual maturity to lead and disciple others in the body of Christ; to encourage them in the way of truth and direct them to follow Jesus. I truly thank God for such people and pray for more of them. The body of Christ needs these kind of ministers. The problem, as I see it, is not a matter of the "clergyman's" sincerity, but it is their very position that often stands in the way. Sometimes that position blinds them also and, though they may be ever so sincere, they still continue to fill a place of mediation between the believer and their Lord that no man is intended to fill. They are calling biblical something that, in all historical truth, was invented by the Roman Catholic Church long after Calvary. Their willingness to support and yield to a system and to stand in an official, professional role that God did not ordain will always make them more of an obstacle and a distraction than a help. People will always look to them in an unhealthy way that is a distraction from the dependency each one should have on Christ alone. Just look at how many people run all over the globe to conferences and to be "touched" by popular ministers and hopefully receive some great gift or healing or power. Yes, I believe the modern traditional ministerial role is largely (more often than not) a distraction from the centrality of Christ. So my comments here are just as much to them as anyone else. If you are one that has operated in this role in ignorance, then repent and be free from your ignorance. What I am suggesting has nothing to do with whether or not God has called you to be one that pastors. Please understand that.

Though I sometimes speak sharply about my disgust for the system of organized religion and the roles of authority within that system that I truly believe are not God-ordained, I am not at all speaking of the precious saints of God who sometimes have placed themselves in these roles. As I said before, I do not presume every reason why the people in these roles are in them. Some are sincere, some are not. Some truly believe God has called them into that role and who am I to be their judge? In the case where there are those who are sincere and truly desire to follow the truth, I pray for their understanding (that they would have courage to embrace the truth) and that God would continue to lead them as they free themselves from all religious ties and submit themselves wholly to the Lordship of the Great Shepherd. A true pastor is not some professional clergyman who runs a church. True pastorin is a gift from Jesus that is given to members of Christ's body to lovingly care for His sheep and that "ministry" can manifest in any number of ways in a number of different environments and professions and without any title or scholastic credentials to qualify it at all. It can even manifest WITHOUT A CHURCH! Biblically speaking, in the body of Christ there are NO senior pastors. There is only ONE Senior Pastor and that is Jesus - the Great Shepherd. Those who love their titles and to have the preeminence are merely manifesting the spirit of anti-Christ. They are not true shepherds at all.

The Falsehood of Full-Time Ministry (a.k.a. Pastor, Get Yourself A Job)

What is a minister? A minister is simply anyone who serves others. That is, in fact, what the word “minister” means; a servant. In a secular context this could be realized as a service that is professional in nature or as a charitable service. In the context of the Chris-centered life, a minister may be anyone who serves others because of a motivation of love, devotion and/or obedience to God. Christ himself was a minister and gave of Himself continually and freely. In the world of Institutional Christianity, however, the term minister is often understood a bit differently; as an official position of religious service. People often associate the term minister with “church leader.” Often times this position holds the expectation of financial support, even salary.

Those thusly employed by this profession of “ministry” are said to be involved in the “full-time ministry” (meaning, generally, that they have decided to stop working a regular, secular job so they can now “minister” full time and be placed on a religious organization’s salary). The startling thing is - such concepts (involving money), which are familiar to institutional Christianity, are NOT found in Scripture as pertaining to true servants of God. On the contrary, the truth is that the Scripture most commonly associates those who minister for a paycheck as false ministers. This may come as a surprise or as an offense to some readers, but I will discuss this in more detail as we continue on this point... I hope to effectively illustrate that Scripture does reveal what I am suggesting through this article.

In addition to the Scripture presenting ministry as being something bestowed freely out of love for others in addition to love for God and obedience to His call, Christ presented ministry as something that cannot
adequately be mixed in any way with some intention to make profit from such service. His conclusion was: You
either serve God or you serve mammon (i.e. to obtain and maintain the things of this world; your possessions,
your money, vanities, etc.). Only one will be your Master (God or mammon) but where serving God is
concerned, never both. Put another way, you might say that if the reason for your "ministry" is to maintain a
paycheck, then you have inadvertently made the paycheck your master rather than God alone. Good intentions
are irrelevant. The true minister of God does so because his devotion is to God and matters not whether it will
guarantee him any financial merit at all. The true servant of God does not take what God freely gives him and
then prostitute it for another purpose. This may be a hard thing for many to consider, but this is the very
instruction of our Master, Jesus Christ.

Matthew 6:24 (WNT) - "No man can be the bondservant of two masters; for either he will dislike one and
like the other, or he will attach himself to one and think slightingly of the other. You cannot be the
bondservants both of God and of gold."

Now, for the record, I do not believe the Scripture teaches that it is wrong for a minister of the gospel to receive
financial gifts from other Christians who desire to support them; however, I believe this should be the exception
(considering the circumstance) and when gifts are given they should be given from free volition, without guilt or
manipulation. Biblical ministers were simply brothers among brothers (and this was their attitude toward one
another). Though some were elder (in spiritual maturity as well as age), they were not "over" the others (as
ones who "rule"). In God's leadership paradigm, it is those who exercise humility, who do not seek titles or the
possessions of others and who do not see ministry as a profession, but who willingly serve others (even laying
down their lives for others) because of love and obedience to the Spirit of God. Only a true servant who prefers
others before himself and who genuinely loves and cares for God's sheep will be an effective "overseer" who
watches out for the others and effectively leads them by a godly example.

Some early Christian ministers were itinerant workers, meaning they did not sit in an office or front pew of a
church and get paid for existing as resident minister, but they traveled on many occasions to bring the Gospel to
other peoples and also encourage believers in different places. Sometimes their purpose was to bring letters
and gifts from the saints in one location to the saints in another. Believers in local gatherings would often
support this minister by giving him a place to lodge when visiting their town and homes, provide him food to eat
and perhaps share some gifts (both financially, spiritually and otherwise) to assist him on his travels. The
greatest reward to this minister was the communion of fellowship among his fellow believers and he would
gladly spend all and be spent for their sakes. But when a minister's travel had ceased for any period of time, it
was his custom to again take up a job and work for his living. Labor was also the mark of dignity for a man. It
was and is the order God had established from the very beginning with Adam. Those who refused to labor for
their living were looked down upon in the community as slothful and lazy.

Traveling ministers in those days were often lovingly supported, but they did not minister for a price. In fact,
those who did "take up" for themselves were viewed as false and were rejected! There is clear evidence of
these mindsets present in the earliest historical writings of the Church. One such example is...

The Didache (Greek translation = The Teaching) is the common name of a brief early Christian treatise (dated
by most scholars to the late first/early second century), containing instructions for Christian communities. From it
we can observe how many of the early believers viewed the matter of money in connection with ministry. It
states the following:

- "If a visiting apostle remains somewhere for 3 days, he's a false prophet" -11:5
- "If he takes anything from God's people except for a loaf of bread, he's a false prophet" -11:6
- "If he asks for money, he is a false prophet" -11:6
- "If a someone says in the Spirit, 'give me money,' do not listen to him" -11:12
- "Christian workers should work for their own bread" -12:3
- "In no way should anyone live among you unemployed as a Christian" -12:4

The early Christian ministers did not live on "love offerings" and "monetary tithes" for no such religious "system"
was known among Christ's followers. They were a family of brothers and sisters with a common vision and a
common love for Jesus that permeated every facet of their individual and corporate lives. As we have
discussed, their travels were indeed sometimes supported with voluntary gifts of the saints and free-will
collections were sometimes gathered for the support of the poor, but they (those who ministered the Gospel)
most consistently labored for their sustenance and never sought to make themselves a burden to the other
believers. This was a principle even among Jewish religious leaders of the day. In fact, the Jews generally
believed that a man who does not work is a disgrace. All of the workers in the synagogues also held secular
professions!
A true minister should rely on God foremost and never make himself a burden to the Saints. Scripture clearly teaches that a minister of the Gospel should work a job just like everyone else. Yes, it does teach that clearly and very directly! Paul worked for his own living (Acts 18:3) and even supported those ministering with him by the labor of his own hands (Acts 20:33-34). Paul said that one of the reasons a minister should hold a job was so that he may support the weak (Acts 20:35), and that doing such was to follow the example of Jesus who counted it more of a blessing to give than to receive. The Scripture says that he made every effort possible to make his ministering without charge to those he ministered to (1 Corinthians 9:18). Barnabas also had this same mindset (1 Corinthians 9:12). Titus had the same mindset as well (2 Corinthians 12:18) as did Paul's other companions, Silvanus and Timotheus (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10). So did James (James 1 & 2). The list goes on and on!

Do you know why Paul chose not to receive money for ministering? It was because he believed so strongly that it might hinder the message of the Gospel of Jesus that he was entrusted to preach! Think about that for a moment... Why would Paul think that a minister receiving money for his ministering could obstruct the clarity of his message? Considering how most of the world (and even many Christians) today view ministers (i.e. televangelists, prosperity teachers, money scandals in the Church, etc.), is it really any wonder? Obviously Paul had a wisdom that still exceeds that of the most popular professional ministers of our day. Will we ever learn? It is just amazing to me how boldly and clearly these things are stated in the Word and how most of those "in the ministry" today live 180 degrees from it.

1 Corinthians 9:12 - If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? Yet we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than put an obstacle in the way of the Good News about Christ.

First of all, this "right" Paul spoke of was for Gospel workers, not so-called pastors of institutional churches, not prophets, not even religious teachers in general... It was for those who gave up literally everything (leaving house and possessions) at the direct command of God to travel bringing the Gospel message to those who had never heard it. The "right" was not to make a living off preaching the Gospel, but to trust that God would meet their basic needs of life. In many cases that might only be a meal or a cloak to cover their back. Yet Paul boldly pointed out the example of himself and those who ministered with him (all of them being Gospel workers); how that all of them refused this "right" and worked for a living (laboring day and night, the Scripture says) so that they would not be a financial burden to any of the believers they were ministering to. They did not expect handouts but paid for everything they ate (2 Thessalonians 3:8). Paul emphatically charged (no pun intended) those who would follow his example that if they expected to eat, they should also work for a living. In fact, Paul stated this was a commandment (2 Thessalonians 3:10)! Unfortunately it is a commandment not many ministers today want to heed. Paul identified these so-called "ministers" who refuse to work for a living - busybodies, because they make it their "business" to spend their "labors" meddling in the affairs of others. Paul very plainly says, "we COMMAND them to settle down and GET TO WORK - AND EARN YOUR OWN LIVING!"

2 Thessalonians 3:11 - Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and wasting time meddling in other people's business. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we appeal to such people-no, we command them: Settle down and get to work. Earn your own living.

Furthermore, Paul said (actually commanded the Church) to withdraw from every brother who did not follow the Apostles' examples in these things (2 Thessalonians 3:6). He also indicated that those who hold to the mindset that godliness is a means of profit are destitute of the truth and plagued by corrupted minds. He strongly warned believers to stay clear of such people!

1 Timothy 6:5-8 - Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

In all of the New Testament you will not find even one example of a minister taking up a "love offering" for himself. You will not find one example or teaching that ministers are to be paid a salary by an institutional church. You will find no hint of an instruction to tithe to some organization or to give money for the purpose of maintaining a building or a program. You will not find a single shred of evidence to support some kind of fund being collected to pay a resident, non-working minister. The biblical word "pastor" is the same word for "shepherd" (which is simply a caring servant of God's people) and, as a matter of fact, Jesus Himself made this point clear when he said the following about such "ministers":

John 10:12-13 (MSG) - "A hired man is not a real shepherd. The sheep mean nothing to him. He sees a wolf come and runs for it, leaving the sheep to be ravaged and scattered by the wolf. He's only in it for
the money. The sheep don't matter to him."

If someone needs a "black and white" statement to confirm the Lord's position on the subject of "pastoring for a paycheck", this should well suffice! Jesus simply answered the question by saying, "If he takes money for it, he's NOT a real pastor." Furthermore, when Jesus sent out the twelve for "mission work" and "preaching abroad" He stuck to this principle:

**Mark 6:8 (GNB)** - and He ordered them, "Don't take anything with you on the trip except a walking stick--- no bread, no beggar's bag, no money in your pockets."

And what about lodging while on these preaching travels? Certainly they would need to find a place to lay their head right? Many so-called ministers today require luxury accommodations for their ministry travels (and usually the expectation is for the congregation they are visiting to pay the bill). But what's wrong with simply staying in the home of a willing guest? This is also what Jesus directed:

**Mark 6:10-11 (CEV)** - "When you are welcomed into a home, stay there until you leave that town. If any place won't welcome you or listen to your message, leave and shake the dust from your feet as a warning to them."

It is impossible to gather from this instruction some method of guilting a congregation to give their money. Here we have the humble picture of disciples of Jesus being content to stay in the home of a welcoming host, eating what's set before them, and then sharing God's message with the community. If there is no welcome, Jesus said to shrug it off and quietly withdraw. No guilt sermons or checking into hotels while you run up a "ministry bill". **The reception of the people (or lack thereof) was their primary indicator as to whether their message was received and whether or not they were meant to stay in that place!** How many ministries today even come close to following such an example? On the contrary, they often rather move into town, set up shop, and then do everything they can to solicit people for money to keep their "ministry" afloat there. They expect "love offerings" and "tithes" to cover their many expenses; travels, lodging, food, cars, and materials. Does the thought of actually getting a job and working for themselves ever cross their mind? Not usually. Does the thought of leaving if their message is not received ever enter their thinking? Not usually. So where is the concern for any example of Scripture in these things, least of all Jesus Christ?

The Message version says it this way:

**Mark 6:10-11 (MSG)** - "And no luxury inns. Get a modest place and be content there until you leave. If you're not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Don't make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way."

Paul and the other apostles of Jesus behaved in the same way with regard to their travels preaching the Gospel. Paul even point out:

**2 Corinthians 2:17 (NIV)** - Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

As you can see, I'm not very enthused (nor, it seems, is the Lord) about the concept of "full time ministry". Such a label itself gives the impression that ministry is a profession. So, am I against Christians giving money to help out Gospel workers? Not at all! But I would have a problem with people being charged for genuine ministry. Ministry is both a call and an act of love - therefore it (in my opinion) must ALWAYS be free of charge! That is the **PLAIN and CLEAR** example of Scripture and the direct instruction of Jesus who said (Matthew 10:8), **"You received without paying, now give without being paid."**

The apostle Peter echoed this same attitude (of freely giving what we have freely received) in his own letter to the believers.

**1 Peter 4:10 (EMTV)** - As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."
The word "minister" in this passage bears no connotation of some kind of "religious office", nor does it imply a "ministry profession". Vine's Greek Dictionary defines ministry here as: "(diakoneo) signifies 'to be a servant, attendant, to serve, wait upon, minister.'" Though the modern church has invented a formal ministry office they call "deacon", Vine further notes the following: "there is nothing in the original representing the word 'office.'" The word "ministry" simply means to serve others and the text in 1 Peter 4 indicates that we do this according to the prime example of the manifold grace of God - who freely gives to us. What is a "gift"? Is it not something which is GIVEN freely rather than presented with a price tag? Would you consider something a gift if someone handed it to you and then charged you some amount for it? If you look up this word "gift" from this passage in a Greek Dictionary, it plainly defines the word gift as: "a FREE gift." But it goes further than that. This word gift itself bears in mind something bestowed from GRACE; that is, given freely without concern of merit on the part of the one receiving it. To sum up, we are talking about something TOTALLY FREE!!!! You cannot pay for it! It is something you receive FREELY from God and something which you can only distribute to others FREELY as well! If someone comes to you claiming to have a message from God or some other kind of spiritual gift intended for your benefit, but who also expects payment for their service, leave them alone! They are not acting as stewards of the manifold grace of God and, by doing such, they only prove themselves false! If I were to paraphrase this passage according to the way the Greek language presents it, I would say it something like this:

1 Peter 4:10 (paraphrased) - As each one has received a free gift from God (based upon His unmerited favor toward us), so the same ought to serve others freely (without charge), thus showing themselves to be a trustworthy steward of the many wonderful blessings which God has given freely.

Offerings may have their place, but in today's religious machine they are common-place and, really, serve as the foundation of pretty much all so-called "ministry!" The thinking is, "without money, we can't do the work of the Lord," (never mind what actually ends up being considered "work of the Lord") and then that great financial burden gets dumped on congregants regardless of their individual convictions to be a part of the things that church leaders deem important (and probably should paying for themselves). Let alone the fact that this concept of "God needs your money" puts the Lord of all heaven and earth in a very weak light; where, apparently, He is only able to effect His will if there is money available for institutional church programs! SPARE ME! (add sarcasm)

So many of these "offerings" go for things that, really, are non-essential to the spreading of the Gospel anyway... Pastor vacations, "ministry conferences" (perhaps that's redundant as this might just as easily fit under "vacations"), church parking lots and building maintenance, choir robes, sound systems, pews, pulpits, hymnals, entertainment systems for "children's church", pool tables and posters for the "youth room", espresso stands for the church foyer, logo-inscribed coffee mugs for new visitors, you name it.

But let's think, for a moment, about the kinds of offerings received by God's people in the first century. Was it for religious luxuries? Was it to send preachers on vacations? Was it to sell their writings/books? Did even one of the apostles or Jesus sell their sermons, letters and books? Was it to maintain church buildings, pay hotel costs for visiting preachers, or afford "ministry staff"? No. Money was given (FREELY I might add) at times to take care of the needs of the impoverished Saints in the city. It was also given at times to help send brothers (like Paul) who could share the Gospel with others and convey messages of encouragement from one group of believers to another (but note that while believers did support Paul on occasion, he never made himself chargeable to those he was ministering to and, with all his power, he purposed to spend all and be spent for their sakes - 2 Corinthians 12:14-15). As Paul stated, "I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children."

It absolutely cannot be overstated that Paul's own example and teaching to those who would serve as overseers/elders of a community of Christians was to work for a living and never become a financial burden to the believers (Acts 20:28-35). Where is this teaching and example today? And why also do so many ministers today neglect to remind the Saints of Paul's warning that those who come with a claim as ministers who expect to be paid and eat without working for a living are false (2 Corinthians 11:9, 13-15)? Paul said that such men, who think that godliness is a means of financial gain, are proud, knowing nothing, they have corrupt minds and are destitute of the truth (1 Timothy 6:5)! He warned the Saints to withdraw from such men and to not follow their evil example (2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Timothy 6:5), but to be content with godliness and be happy just having food and clothing. Granted this message won't be very popular with those who are privy to what many are calling the prosperity doctrine today, but it is the message of truth from God's Holy Word.

Now (as I mentioned previously), on occasion, Christians did support Paul's travels financially and Paul encouraged the Saints to consider those that spend their lives ministering the Gospel, but the gifts were given freely, from love and in response to need (ACTUAL NEED - i.e. FOOD AND CLOTHING).

1 Timothy 6:6-11 (NKJV) - Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall...
be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

Financial (and other) gifts from the saints were not derived by compulsion or from tithing or from some organizational system that officially employed such people and put them on a salary. Likewise those who consider themselves ministers today and shepherds of the flock, should pursue a mindset like Christ and like Paul and they should expect the rest of us to judge them based on the example and teaching we were given by God in the Scriptures. I fully believe that IF God has ordained their service than He will also fully provide every legitimate need they have. But the minister should not have a high and mighty opinion that he is above the need to earn his own living and provide for his family and ministry. He should get a job! This will also help to insure he remains humble, walking in sincere faith (being dependent upon God for his needs), and in view as a fellow brother in Christ rather than placing himself in an elitist position by default. So, in conclusion of this point, if indeed there are sincere men and women who seek to serve God's people (even if they presently do so in positions of institutionalized church ministry), I would simply like to challenge them to examine their motives fully. I personally believe that the organizational system (along with the positions it employs and makes demands of) tends more to be an obstacle to their effectiveness and to a pure manifestation of body life and ministry.

Live Freely, Follow Christ, Flee Religion!

So again, please do not remove my comments from context and presume that I am telling anyone to do anything outside of God's will for their lives. God may call some to leave an institutional church or He may desire them to stay according to His sovereign purpose. I do think it may be possible to attend a religious institution without also being "religious" (as it pertains to a person's controlling mindset), though many end up yielding to the will of that system over time. I do have close friends that I know God has set free in their thinking and they are no longer slave to an institutional mindset, but they sometimes still attend an institutional church. There may also be those who experience God opening their eyes about the error in the religious system, but their spouse does not draw the same conclusion and so it can be very difficult for these folks.

Whatever the case, we must align ourselves with the will of Christ! HE MUST BECOME OUR COMPLETE PASSION! Simply meeting in a building (to sing, pray, or listen to teaching together with other Christians), of course, does not automatically make someone "religious" and I am not suggesting any such thing. But when a routine begins to take place of the spontaneous life of the Spirit and, especially, the lordship of Jesus Christ at work in the life of each individual, then watch out! When the "need" of the institution and its program begin to manipulate the members to give central regard for its well-being rather than only Christ, RUN! Don't just run for your life, run for HIS life!!! The religious mindset is a deceptive thing and if Christ is not lifted up as Head of His body, then all that will ever remain is religion! I have been encouraged to discover that many around the world are experiencing a "holy discontentment" (as Brian Hennessy once put it) with the routine of organized religion. People are beginning to awake to a burning desire for "more" than the routine, more than just weekly duty, more than just business as usual. Praise God!!! May it be so for all of God's children, that we may all come alive to Him!

The heart here is to emphasize and encourage intimate relationship with God, NOT "religion" (i.e. just following a pattern of ritual and routine - which is most often plagued by the deception of which some people actually think this process of religious routine will make them more "holy," cause God to be pleased with them or bring them closer to Him).

People need to understand that God is so much bigger than religion! He's bigger than Sunday morning! He's bigger than all the religious activities and programs people typically participate in (yes, even "church"). Religion cannot hold HIM and neither does He dwell in the structures built by human hands as many have presumed. How often have we heard the greeting, "Welcome to the House of God" or "Isn't it good to be in the House of the Lord today?" Of course by these types of phraseology we mean "the church building" or "the conference center" that we are gathered at. It is a concept that has become ingrained in our thinking by hundreds of years of tradition, but not from Scripture. There is only one designation for the "House of God" today and it is not the buildings we attend and call "the church." In case you think that's too radical a statement, I direct your attention to the Word of God:

Acts 17:24 - "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands."

Hebrews 9:24 - "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of
Yes, the true Church is the very people of God who assemble under the Headship of Christ; they are His body. His Spirit indwells each one! So a building can never be “the House of God.” It is just absolutely impossible! Most Christians understand this theologically but I dare say few really take it to heart literally. Some will say, “yes, but the building we meet in represents it.” No again! The “temple” of the Old Covenant represented the dwelling place of God and that temple no longer exists. It, along with all of its ordinances and rituals, served as a type and shadow that pointed to Christ’s New Covenant. The New Testament repeatedly makes this astoundingly clear - that system IN NO WAY has application for the New Covenant believer:

Colossians 2:14-17 - [Jesus] having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Hebrews 8:3-9:1; 9:8-11 - For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary......... the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience; concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

Hebrews 10:1-3 - For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

Ephesians 2:14-16 - For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thas making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

Galatians 3:1-3 - O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?
The Church, in Scripture, is never again the spiritualized parallel tactic is employed, whether or not it violates New Covenant theology. Christians falsely assume that their churches are just modern day manifestations of the Old Temple in the Bible. Being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the spirit, with love and from grace (Romans 7:6 - "But now we are delivered from the law, that bondrage that robs the Christian of his liberty in Christ and strips him of his privilege to serve the Lord in the Christian experience - and then they call these things "essential." They do this by taking things like Mosaic ordinances, found in the Bible, and spiritualize them (right out of their original context) in order that they may be applied to the New Covenant believer. A perfect example of this that is so popular in the church today is the ordinances, found in the Bible, and spiritualize them (a discussion too lengthy to get into here). Yet when one confronts the strict terms of the New Testament concerning how we regard that old law, we find no support for enforcing such ordinances - not to mention that what our modern parallels consist of look nothing like what we read about in the Bible. When such ordinances are imposed on the Christian, not only is this a perversion of biblical truth, but it is a shackel of bondage that robs the Christian of his liberty in Christ and strips him of his privilege to serve the Lord in the newness of the spirit, with love and from grace (Romans 7:6 - "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."). Another great example, as I have already mentioned previously, is the Old Testament Temple. Many Christians falsely assume that their churches are just modern day manifestations of the Old Temple in the Bible. Again the spiritualized parallel tactic is employed, whether or not it violates New Covenant theology.

The idea of a royal assembly of functioning priests who are all brothers and all are intended to participate in the organic assembly of Christ has been all but lost to a form that rather imposes passivity and a completely unbiblical separation between clergy and laypeople - terms that stem, literally, from wordly influence and even pagan tradition and concepts, not from the New Testament. In short, today's church looks nothing like what we
see manifested in Scripture. We have turned 180 degrees from that pattern and example and followed our own invention - even changing the meaning of the words that are written in God's holy Scripture so that they fit more evenly with our traditions.

Where did this word "church" come from? Didn't it come from the Bible? Well, it may surprise some to discover that this word "church" is not found ANYWHERE in the New Testament Greek! It is wholly a product of tradition, not honest biblical translation. Believe it or not that is an historical fact. Our modern word "church" is actually derived from the Middle English word "chirche", which is from the Old English word "cirice". There is speculation about how the word originally came into being, but many scholars believe that it comes from (or perhaps I should say "was inspired by") the Greek word "kuriakon", which is a derivative of "kuriakos". Kuriakos is used in the New Testament (twice) and means "of or belonging to the Lord" (examples of use: 1 Corinthians 11:20; Revelations 1:10). Kuriakon means "the Lord's house" (hence some scholars are under the presumption that this word inspired the word "church" since church is regarded as being "the Lord's house"), but oddly enough, kuriakon is not ever used at all in the New Testament! Even Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary tells us that the word "church" used in the Bible probably comes from this Greek word "kuriakon". Then why isn't "kuriakon" in the Bible? Good question! The words "kukarion" and "ekklesia" are NOT synonymous! In the 16th Century, men of God like William Tyndale (Greek scholar and translator of the first printed English Bible) knew it and did not translate "ekklesia" as "church"... They burned him at the stake and called him a heretic! Kuriakon, or "The Lord's house" (emphasis on "house"), implies a location, a structure of some sort. While someone may suggest the idea that "the Lord's house" could also have a spiritual connotation (since the believer - both in an individual and corporate sense - is the "house" of the Lord), what must be understood is that since the emerging religion of Roman Catholicism already was placing huge emphasis on elaborate structures (which were titled as being "churches"), it is easy to see how this word "kurkarion" would naturally be implied, i.e. the "house" of God being viewed as the church building and all the rituals connected to it.

Ekklesia, in contrast, refers only to the assembly (emphasis on the "assembling") and that those who are assembled together have been called out by the Lord. This "assembly" is not dependant upon a building, a program or even a hierarchical rule of institutional "church" government. It wasn't until sometime after 200 A.D. that these opposing concepts began to merge and the Ekklesia started to be referred to more in terms of a religious meeting place (and its religious program). As the Roman Empire grew and monopolized its version of Christianity, the term "church", speaking of an edifice and the rituals attributed to it, had become set in concrete. And by the time that the Emperor Constantine had established himself as the "Vicar of Christ" (meaning the "substitute" for Christ) over the Church and imposed his top-down rule of government, this influence has (ever since) remained predominantly in tact and virtually unchallenged, even though the Scripture does not support it (e.g. Luke 22:24-27) and history shows that neither did the early Church support it, for the first few hundred years after Calvary.

Therefore what we are seeing is that from the earliest influence of Roman Catholicism, right up to the present day, "church" has been typically understood according to its traditional definition, NOT according to its biblical one! This is a large part of why I say that Christianity today is largely "Churchianity" in light of the influence it has derived from traditional, NOT biblical, teachings. We have bought into a myth that "church" is about maintaining a routine and mandatory program that God is not able to work without. We have been led to believe that this "activity" of attending church and "plugging in" to its programs is the most essential part of being a Christian. So our lives, as believers, tend to center more around this thing called "church" than it does simply around the Lord and the revelation that WE ARE HIS CHURCH (His Ekklesia; His assembly; His people)!

But... But... What About "Christian Duty"?

"Outreach," for example, has often become something we do, not because our lives have been impacted by Christ or because we feel compelled by His Spirit. It is something we regard as our "Christian duty," rather than our privilege and the response of a heart in love with Jesus. Too often "outreach" and "evangelism" are seen mostly as elements of the "church program." Often we engage in this because church attendance is low, finances aren't coming in, things seem to be drying up and the life the church once seemed to experience is fading, or we simply feel it is our religious duty. Sometimes it's also engaged in because we feel a sense of spiritual pride in that we are serving God so faithfully. All such reasons are carnal and amount, essentially, to dead works! And most importantly we forget that it is not us, by our efforts, that add any soul to the Lord's Church - but only Christ who does this!

Acts 2:47 - "...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."
I know of smaller, struggling churches who have tried all sorts of "evangelistic" methods to try and boost attendance. They sit around imagining and planning what kinds of "activities" they can possibly start to bring people into the church; advertising, block parties, car washes, tracts, etc. Even some very good methods like "prayer walking" or "feeding the hungry." The problem is that when these "outreach tactics" center around "building the church" (meaning the building and program we attend each week) they are completely centered on the wrong thing! Evangelism must be centered on Christ only! All of our evangelistic efforts should spring forth from hearts bursting with Christ's love, not because we merely feel we have to as Christians or because it might help "grow the church."

When I see small churches that are struggling to survive and I see that the pastors who lead them are discouraged and don't know why things don't kick in, my heart feels sorrow. I see them start going to church growth conferences and they start reading books and watching videos by other pastors that got out of a slump and made themselves a success. As the hopelessness and discouragement grows they start trying all kinds of things to stir the waters, never seeing the obvious problem. I wish they could see that as long they keep trying to "have church" they will never find the freedom and joy of being the church. As long they keep trying to "oil the machine" and maintain the program, church will continue to be a weekly routine that bores everyone to sleep and keeps the lost outside and completely disinterested.

Unfortunately, this is business as usual in most churches today. Some really have a good program together, but too often the program remains the center and not the Lord. The emotional stimuli that the well-planned program creates most consistently numbs a person's sensitivity to the Spirit and blinds the eyes from seeing that, spiritually, they are drying up and really exchanging abundant life for religious death. It is a wicked and deceptive trap of the enemy! I wonder what would happen if the program, the building and all that maintains it was taken out of the way (including those who are recognized as leaders of the program), would those that attend really know how to function like the body of Christ without the program? Would they be able to relate naturally and organically with each other without the aid of a schedule or planned activity led by some leader? Don't be so quick to answer that one... Really think about it. How many would leave in frustration and just go look for another church that has a better program to fit their "needs"?

Let me tell you something: There are churches I know of that have a decent program in tact, and they have a difficult enough time just keeping people coming and participating (not to mention paying their tithes), and that's with a host of great activities, classes, outreach programs, etc. It is likely that when the finances and the attendance start to wane, you will hear the ministry push out their share of sermons on "being faithful", giving more money to the church, "plugging in" and increasing "evangelism" (i.e. encourage more people to come church, especially lost friends so they can get saved - and we can then presume the logical result; the numbers will increase and hopefully the finances as well). I have heard of and been present in services where the pastor will discuss the financial needs of the church and then encourage parents to teach their children how to tithe. Or people that have not been in services for a while will sometimes receive letters or phone calls encouraging them to get back in services, not usually because they are missed, but more likely because their weekly offerings are missed (it's more than logical to make this assumption since, most of the time, they are contacted by people who never have had relationship with them or they receive personalized form letters). Or take an afternoon and go down to the nursing homes on the day of the month that social security checks come out and watch all the people that have not been in services for a while will sometimes receive letters or phone calls encouraging them to "plugging in" and increasing "evangelism" (i.e. encourage more people to come church, especially lost friends so they can get saved - and we can then presume the logical result; the numbers will increase and hopefully the finances as well). I have heard of and been present in services where the pastor will discuss the financial needs of the church and then encourage parents to teach their children how to tithe. Or people that have not been in services for a while will sometimes receive letters or phone calls encouraging them to get back in services, not usually because they are missed, but more likely because their weekly offerings are missed (it's more than logical to make this assumption since, most of the time, they are contacted by people who never have had relationship with them or they receive personalized form letters). Or take an afternoon and go down to the nursing homes on the day of the month that social security checks come out and watch all the pastors that show up to collect tithe checks from the elderly. It's hard not to feel just a little bit of anguish when I hear of ministries who resort to such methods to help secure their livelihood and keep the program running.

Back To Basics! Back To Jesus!

But imagine if all the religious "filler" was taken out of the way? By "filler" I mean all those aspects of "church" we typically expect to be in place every week (in fact, we most often think they are the definition of church); a meticulously full-featured, pre-planned 2 hour scheduled service - complete with an elaborate, well-rehearsed song service, church-financed musical equipment, a 12-point sermon by a professional pastor, padded seats, power-point viewer screens, expensive sound systems, special music, Sunday school classes, mid-week programs, fancy offices for the pastoral staff, staff period, computers, espresso machines for the "coffee fellowship" in the foyer after services, large high-maintenance buildings, etc. This list could go on forever. Take all of that out of the way! What would be left? Would the simple group of people that remain, who have been stripped of all the external religious paraphernalia, be able to connect relationally with one another and maintain the desire to meet just that simply with the only focus of the assembly being the Lord Jesus? Would they be able to do this without trying re-constitute old traditions? It leads us to question, what really motivated their meeting together to begin with? If it was simply Jesus, wouldn't simply Jesus be sufficient, not to mention even more exhilarating and fulfilling than all the stuff of religion? Would they still be compelled to invite their friends and the unsaved to visit without all the "pomp and circumstance" of modern churchianity? This question challenges us to ask, "what does the Gospel really mean to us?"

I honestly do not believe those same people (at least not the majority of them) would make a corporate effort to
gather house to house (or wherever) as they did in the book of Acts. The relationships just aren't there. Most of them would just look for another church with a better program. I have seen and even been a part of churches where you don't know from one week to the next if anyone was going to show up. I've seen all the tactics in action to try and pull people in and put some kind of program together that might keep them interested. Churches that struggle like this I know would not be able to stand for a second if the program and its leadership were taken out of the way! They could barely hold together when all of that stuff was there in place! Yet when you read the New Testament story you find that in every case where believers were established in the faith by the message of the Apostles (what some today would call "starting a church"), those same Apostles left that fellowship alone completely, virtually in every case without leaders! Sometimes leaders didn’t rise up out of a group of Christians in a community for months and even years! And they didn't just get by... THEY THRIVED SPIRITUALLY!!! Not only that, but the lost was drawn to them! There was something amazingly different about those Christians and the way they interacted with one another. They were teeming with life and joy. The lost weren't witnessing a new club, they were witnessing NEW LIFE! Which should lead us to ask the question why this isn't true today? I suggest to you it is largely because we are not building on the biblical concept of assemblies that are simply centered around Jesus, but we are instead building a program and, in many cases, just an earthly religious kingdom!

"House to house", autonomous, informal gatherings without official leaders, without pastors (in the modern sense), without worship teams and routine religious activities are unthinkable today! We must have a building (we think we must anyway), a song service, a piano player, a pastor, an offering time, a sermon, a bulletin, pews, a weekly schedule that never changes, etc. Somewhere we have come up with the idea that "a church" is something God has required us to start, maintain and require others to attend, and yet such a command is completely absent from the Scriptures! Go ahead, try to find it yourself. Try to find one inkling of institutionalism in the New Testament story. You just won't. Believe me I have searched and searched. It is just not there anywhere. (I wholly recommend reading the article "Starting A Church" by Gaylon Embrey when you have some time.)

The reality is that the Lord builds His own Church and He is the only "Senior Pastor" (the Great Shepherd) of that Church (Note: The word "pastor" in the Scripture means "shepherd"). His Church is not made with human hands but it is A SPIRITUAL HOUSE made of LIVING STONES. It is a royal assembly of those, not who belong to some organization, but whose names are written in heaven. This is what you will find in the Bible!

Psalm 127:1 - "...Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it..."

Matthew 16:18 - "...upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

1 Corinthians 1:2 - "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

Ephesians 1:20-23 - "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

Isaiah 9:6 - For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Ephesians 5:23 - "...Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body."

Colossians 1:18 - "And He (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." (c.f. 3 John 1:9 where a man, instead of Christ, loves to have the preeminence over the church)

1 Peter 2:2-5 - "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 12:23 - "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect..."

Acts 7:48-49 - "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is
the place of my rest?"

**Acts 17:24** - "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

**Hebrews 13:20** - "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that **great shepherd** of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**John 10:11-16** - (Jesus said) "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

**1 Peter 5:1-4** - The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; **Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.**

**Psalm 23:1** (my translation) - "...The LORD is my Pastor; I shall not want."

These are but a few of the many verses in the Scriptures which show the organic nature of God's Church and who its "Senior Pastor" truly and completely is. So when we begin to see that the Bible's concept of "church" is clearly people, then we do not place any spiritual emphasis on structures and programs. We can see clearly that when the early Christians met together (wherever they met together) the emphasis was always upon Christ (the reason for their assembling); certainly the meeting place was never regarded so significantly as it is today. In fact, the Bible places absolutely no significance in it at all! As stated previously, most often the church (meaning the believers) gathered in their homes. This was informal and intimate. The concept of family generally comes to mind when one thinks of "home" and this is exactly the picture we see with the early believers, they were as family. Many in what has been called the "house church movement" today have found value in this expression of meeting because of its non-institutional focus and it conduciveness to a more family-like, non-religious atmosphere. While it may also be said that some even within the house church movement have merely substituted the institutional concept of meeting with meeting in the home, many do not place so much focus on the meeting place at all but more importantly on the meeting and the quality of relationship with Christ and one another.

While it's true that many large churches today first started out in a home, the desire was (most presumably) never to stay in that environment. The desire was to find a "pastor" and grow to sufficient size that they could purchase a building, employ a host of "ministry activities", and the pastor could quit his secular job and have a full-time salary in the church. I've rubbed shoulders in the past with religious leaders and heard them talk about this with their own mouths. Friends, this kind of thinking is absolutely foreign to the New Testament story! Our concept of church today is not simply people gathered together around the Lord - expressing His heart and mind corporately. Our concept of church is a program (and one that is orchestrated and performed by a professional clergy - while the majority of those gathered - a.k.a. "the laypeople" - sit quietly and passively, staring at the back of someone's head)! You will find this true in virtually every organized institutional church on planet earth. I suppose I have reiterated my point here enough; today's church is largely an elaborate program of organized religion.

In the New Testament, we have a picture of something drastically different. Something that was evident of a lifestyle, not a religious order. Nothing about first century Christianity was "traditional", "formal" or "programmed." In fact, there was no such thing as a "church building" in their day or a typical pattern service that was routinely the same each week. There were no pulpits, no Sunday school programs, no visitor cards and offering envelopes, no ushers, no hymn books, no worship teams, no dress codes, nothing of the sort! In fact (at the risk of offending a few nice folks), there was no focus on some kind of pattern to have "house churches" either... Despite the fact that I am able to recognize the very positive elements enjoyed by those who today meet in this fashion (and I am not directly discouraging this activity), I think the error comes when "house churching" is made an issue of. The early believers met in
their homes simply because that's where family and friends already gathered. There was no decision to "start a house church" or to "be a part of the house church movement" for they understood that THEY were the Church. I only clarify this point because some have written me and presumed that I endorse the "house church movement" and they ask me what pattern I follow. I don't follow a pattern. I follow Christ and so should you! What I am highlighting here is the obvious natural lifestyle of following Jesus that the early believers engaged in.

Indeed, believers often joined together for times of tangible fellowship. They often met informally, house to house, having large meals together (often inviting the impoverished in the community to come and eat with them), ministering to one another, and celebrating the Lord. Sometimes they gathered by the riverside or other simple places. Occasionally they would gather in larger places in greater numbers but the whole of ministry and fellowship transpired in the smaller groups. There were no hierarchical structures of governmental leadership, only brothers and sisters who mutually edified one another and all of them participated in the gatherings, each one ministering their unique giftings to encourage and build up one another. The "ministry" of that day were not professional clergy with private offices and counseling schedules but they were humble servants who preferred to remain on a relational level with the rest of the brethren. Most often they worked for their own living (i.e. secular labor) and actually viewed those who called themselves "ministers" but did so for a price as being equivalent to wolves. Ministry was not understood in lei of titles of prominent positions or as professions but as service according to a ministry "gift" bestowed on that person by the Holy Spirit and this service was ALWAYS actuated from love and obedience to the Spirit's prompting, NOT because it held some promise of being sustained financially. The monies AND possessions that were gathered together were always given mutually to support others who were in financial need (of course this sometimes included those who were about the service of ministry). This they did as the needs arose and every person gave according to their ability and as each person purposed in their own hearts or was led by the Spirit. Giving was never by compulsion, according to mandates or based on Old Testament rituals but was to be actuated from love, in response to God's grace, and with hilarious joy!

Yes, a New Testament gathering was something special indeed and certainly not like what is typical and routine today. Christians simply met together and their focus was continually Christ. You will never find a teaching or emphasis on a program of religion anywhere in the New Testament! Christianity was a way of life, in fact that is what the early Church referred to it as; they were called followers of "the Way", emphasis of course on "the Way" being Christ Himself. They had no thought of religion. This Christian life was LIFE itself! It revolved around Christ, not programs, rituals and routines. Fellowship was something tangible, natural, organic and directly related to life in Christ. It is vitally important that Christians see this because it reveals something so magnificently different about what the Christian life entails apart from what many of us have presumed it entails because of our traditions.

### The Wind of the Spirit Blows Wherever It Wills

This revelation changes nearly everything we've always known (or thought we knew). Granted this is a most difficult reality to accept because it fights just about every traditional concept we have been guided by since our introduction to Christ. Certainly this causes us to have to re-evaluate many things and perhaps ask ourselves the question, "do we really want to see revival or are we content with business as usual?" Our ready to come to grips with the fact that walking with God requires that we open our "spiritual sails" (so to speak) and truly allow the Wind of His Spirit to blow us in whatever direction He desires, even if it's against the traditional flow? The Word of God declares that our life of worship cannot be actuated any other way!

God is Spirit and all those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. The Bible likens the Spirit of God to the wind, that cannot be seen, grasped with human understanding, but He breathes where He will and EVERY ONE WHO IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD is the same! We must learn to flow with the movement of His Spirit.

**John 3:8 (emphasis added) - "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

Four walls cannot encapsulate this "wind." A building or a routine cannot control it or direct it any more than it can promise those who participate in such things are led by this "wind." This "wind" of the Spirit of God, blows wherever it wishes! When we attempt to control, manipulate and structure the moving of His Spirit, it's often not long before He lifts His manifested presence from our midst and what remains is merely our traditional planned program. It's no wonder so many people who just attend church thinking this is the "be-all-and-end-all" of their Christian experience are so spiritually dry, bored to death, weary, defeated in their spirits, often questioning God, wondering where His power and the manifestation of His presence is in "the church", longing for more but never thinking that vibrant relationship with Him is possible without the "machine" of organized religion. It is possible friends! In fact, I would dare suggest to you that it is essential!
We can actually communicate with Him as a close, intimate friend and walk in newness of life without the restriction and confinement of the box of religion! It's time we who are called by His holy name throw off the robes of man's false righteousness and put on Christ. God is completely real and we can talk to Him AND EXPECT THAT HE WANTS TO TALK BACK AND WILL if we tune our hearts to hear Him. True fellowship in the body of Christ is not automatic! It doesn't just happen because you attend some church or religious conference, meeting or participate in a Christian program. Fellowship is qualified by our relationship with the Master, our being born into Christ, and our choice to walk in His truth!

1 John 1:7 - "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

Fellowship is not merely something we "do" and neither is it someplace we attend, rather it is something we "have" because of our connection with Christ! Too many believers today are connected to "religious things" and center their attentions and efforts on these "things" rather than Christ alone being all in all. When we try to find "fellowship" with one another through or define it by our participation in religious programs we are already missing the point! That is not, nor does it constitute true fellowship. If Christ becomes truly central then we will have fellowship with one another!

The point of this message is not to suggest that meeting together with Christians is wrong. God forbid you would get this impression! The point is that the practice of religion does not equal relationship! You can, quite honestly, attend church meetings until you are blue in the face and never come one step closer to the Master! You can get involved with scores of evangelistic programs and ministries and still never touch Him intimately! Going to church doesn't make you spiritual! Attending services isn't how you "fulfill your Christian calling." Participating in programs doesn't mean you are advancing in your walk with Christ at all!

KNOWING CHRIST is what is essential! Sadly this is not the message most Christians are influenced by today. They are rather taught to qualify their spirituality by how regularly they attend services, how many theological degrees they have, how faithfully they tithe, or by how many religious activities they participate in. Instead of truly discovering what it is to seek the Lord, intimately know His voice and be led by His Spirit, Christians run to "get words" or some "special anointing" from some "great" man of God, they attend conferences, read scores of books, and purchase tapes and videos to try and "improve themselves" spiritually. They are, essentially, being led about by "religious things" and not the Master Himself and those "things" become the agent they hope will affect change in their lives. The Spirit is not intimately involved in this process at all. Oh His name is often referred to, but it is the "things" that are hoped in to work "miracles" in their lives more than the direct work of the Spirit of God Himself. It is a subtle but strong deception that keeps people from diving full on into relationship with Christ.

Think about this for a moment: Where do you suppose those other Christian ministers got their "special anointings" from? Did they get it from another minister and then that minister from another minister? Where did the source of this "special anointing" come from or this special wisdom, teaching, insight? I would hope that at some point we could identify that it came from God. We have a tendency in the Church to idolize certain prominent men and women of God. Oh that we will wake up and realize that God is able to anoint you with everything required for the fulfilling of your ministry. I am not suggesting that God never speaks through or ministers through other saints. I am just saying that for too long Christians have been misdirected in their seeking; looking to this and that, to this preacher and that prophet, and not really being convinced in their hearts that their Father in heaven seeks to give them the kingdom, to supply every need, to anoint for every purpose, and to channel His love, power, and wisdom THROUGH THEM!

As brother Chip Brogden said in a recent message he gave, "it would do you well to get locked in a room alone for six months and don't come out until you've seen Him, until you've experienced the Lord, until you've heard His voice." It must become our determination, as it was Paul's determination, to concern ourselves only with KNOWING Christ intimately and His cross.

1 Corinthians 2:2 - "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

I believe the vibrant life we read of in the New Testament is possible today! Personally, I don't think we will ever see it manifested though in a setting where religion is the dominating feature of a gathering. There have been a lot of prophetic words spoken in recent months about a mighty wave of God's presence and power being
manifested through small groups that are gathering informally outside of the institutional religious system. I've talked with former pastors and evangelists that have made the bold decision to move beyond traditional ministry to simply serving the Lord in day to day life without emphasis on their titles and ministerial professions. I have heard many of them say that they sincerely believe the next revival we will see will be "on the streets!" I personally believe the Lord is gathering a remnant now that does not concern themselves with "doing" church but emphasizes "being" the Church of the Lord, simply and purely. I believe God is raising up a people who are JUST PEOPLE who are in love with Jesus, not a program. It's these kind of people that will reach their neighborhoods and work places ("the streets") with the Gospel because the Gospel to them is not something they talk about and participate in once a week at a specialized service; rather it is their life and breath! I believe the next true wave of "revival" (if you must have the term) will not be found in the Institutional Church. This is not to say they are beyond the reach of God or that He cares less for them. But I believe His concern is not for that old system at all, but He is calling His people! If a system is set before Him in precedence, then that system is just as much an obstacle to the will and purpose of God as any other obstacle.

Please don't be offended when I speak as I do about the Institutional Church. It is that system of religion I am referring to, not God's people. I myself came out of that system. I met the Lord within its walls (in spite of its errant influences). God's grace has been magnificent. But now it's time to move on to maturity. The devil has succeeded in blinding so many and deafening their ears to the Master's call; The devil's deception is so effective because of the package it is wrapped in; the package of religion. Jesus tore the curtain of religion that separated His people from the Father when He came and died on the cross. We have been, it seems, working so hard to sew the curtain back together with our grand ideas of programmizing fellowship and ministry. I pray that God would open our eyes and draw our attentions back upon Him.

**Prayer:** God, deliver us from the distraction of "things", even those things that are intended to be good things. God, deliver us from "churchianity" and religion and from seeking to define who we are by what church we may attend or which ministry we participate in. Help us Lord to find who we are ONLY in our relationship with You! Let the Lord of Glory fill our eyes and flood our hearts. Remove all the distractions Father. Shake off and break off everything that has separated us from You. Purge the mind-sets of religion from our hearts Lord and let us be consumed with You! Amen!