

# The Cosmic Battle



## and the **American-Christian Dilemma**

January 17, 2009

February 13, 2009

Ken Stoltzfus (Sr.)

But you are a chosen race,  
a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
a people for God's own possession,  
that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him  
who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light

## **The Cosmic Battle and the American-Christian Dilemma**

© January 2009, Ken Stoltzfus, P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636 USA

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author.

The above statement notwithstanding, you hereby have my permission to download this document; print it off; and/or otherwise share it with others in its unaltered form; as long as its use is for strictly personal, non-commercial, non-profit purposes.

I will appreciate your sharing *The Cosmic Battle* with others by sending them the [www.flyinghigher.net](http://www.flyinghigher.net) address. There is a link to this material on the home page. I have also posted some flying stories at the top of the home page, and several other series of inspirational articles at the bottom.

This in-process document comes out of my concern for the people of God as we approach what appears to be a time when our faith will be challenged.

For what its worth, life would be easier for me if these kinds of thoughts didn't come. The fact is that they do come, and usually in my quiet times with God when I'm just trying to hear him and mind my own business – and I feel constrained to write them out.

I invite your input, be it affirmation and encouragement, challenge or correction, or further insight. And please tell me if you find awkward or unclear expressions or other flaws!

I would be delighted to have others partner in this effort, including writing some comments which I could post on the web site. Because of the nature of the subject I would understand and respect your desire to not be identified.

My hope is that this material will challenge individuals, and will be used as a basis for discussion among serious Christians – or those who think they might want to be.

Ken Stoltzfus

P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636      [cosmic@flyinghigher.net](mailto:cosmic@flyinghigher.net)

Unless otherwise noted, scripture is taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

## Table of Contents

### Introduction

<a href="#"><u>Facilitating Discussion</u></a>	7
<b>Part I <a href="#"><u>The Battle of the Ages</u></a></b>	<b>8</b>
1 <a href="#"><u>The Cosmic Battle</u></a>	10
2 <a href="#"><u>A Cosmic Worldview</u></a>	11
3 <a href="#"><u>God and the Nations</u></a>	12
<b>Part II <a href="#"><u>The American-Christian Dilemma</u></a></b>	<b>14</b>
4 <a href="#"><u>Change</u></a>	15
5 <a href="#"><u>God and Country</u></a>	16
6 <a href="#"><u>What It Means</u></a>	17
7 <a href="#"><u>Looking Ahead</u></a>	18
<b>Part III <a href="#"><u>Opportunity Is - -</u></a></b>	<b>19</b>
8 <a href="#"><u>I Saw - -</u></a>	20
9 <a href="#"><u>The Challenge</u></a>	21
10 <a href="#"><u>Guilty as Charged?</u></a>	22
11 <a href="#"><u>If My People - -</u></a>	23
<b>Part IV <a href="#"><u>New Foundations</u></a></b>	<b>24</b>
12 <a href="#"><u>A New Definition of Life</u></a>	25
13 <a href="#"><u>A New Object of Worship - The Call</u></a>	27
14 <a href="#"><u>The Object of Worship</u></a>	28
<b>Part V <a href="#"><u>The Foundation of A New Nature</u></a></b>	<b>29</b>
15 <a href="#"><u>A New Nature</u></a>	30
16 <a href="#"><u>Transformed Into the Image of Christ</u></a>	31
17 <a href="#"><u>Filled With the Spirit</u></a>	33
18 <a href="#"><u>A New Identity</u></a>	35
19 <a href="#"><u>A New View of Blessing</u></a>	36

<b>Part VI <u>The New Look</u></b>	<b>38</b>
20 <u>The Mark of Authenticity</u>	39
21 <u>The “Stuff”</u>	40
22 <u>The Church</u>	42
23 <u>Unity</u>	44
24 <u>Bible Reading and Prayer</u>	45
25 <u>A New View of Suffering</u>	46
<b>Part VII <u>The Dividing Line</u></b>	<b>48</b>
26 <u>The Name</u>	49
27 <u>The Options</u>	51
28 <u>Betrayal</u>	53
29 <u>Trustworthy?</u>	54
<b><u>Conclusion</u></b>	<b>56</b>
<b><u>Footnotes</u></b>	<b>58</b>
<b><u>A Day of Repentance, Reconciliation and Restoration</u></b>	<b>59</b>
<b><u>The Final Word</u></b>	<b>61</b>
<b><u>Bibles for Ministry, at Big Discounts</u></b>	<b>64</b>
<b><u>Ken’s Book, <i>Restless Teens and those who nurture them</i></u></b>	<b>65</b>

## Introduction

First of all, please understand that my use of I Peter 2:9 (NAS) on the cover refers to the “Christian” part of “American-Christian.”

Secondly, nobody agrees with anybody about everything and you won’t agree with everything I say here. However, I challenge you to embrace a Biblical worldview that lifts us above the secondary issues which now separate God-fearing and born again Christians. Please read “The Cosmic Battle” from that standpoint. Does it fit within the context of the fundamentals of faith that Christians have always believed, even if it doesn’t totally harmonize with your personal theological bundle?

This is not a message to America. It is a word to those who call themselves “Christian,” and who live in America. These are serious words for serious times; written to a church that is in serious trouble; in a world that is in utter turmoil. Maybe it’s time for Christians to sit up and take notice.

Nothing that I say is meant to suggest that we turn from appropriate patriotism and love for our country, and gratitude toward God for the blessing of being American. We need to pray for our leaders as never before, and the most patriotic thing American-Christians could do is to begin to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind.

Christians and others alike have **a gnawing sense that troubles are just around the corner**. Economic woes; major world religions in a faceoff; fear of untreatable disease; natural storms of apparently increasing intensity; fear of global warming; the threat of rogue nations with nuclear capabilities; growing pessimism about peace in the Middle East and more, are panicking our world.

I am not prophesying the rise of the antichrist; a soon-coming “mark of the beast;” or the destruction of America. Any of that could happen soon or not for many years – I really don’t know. I’m more a pastor-teacher than a prophet. What I *am* saying is that we are not doing a very good job of representing the heart of God to our nation or our world, and we’re facing a good opportunity to get serious about that!

**This document is intended to provoke your own sober thinking** and inquiry into what God is doing as you watch events unfold in the years ahead. He wants to speak to your heart and draw you closer to Himself as the sky darkens, so that you will stand firm yourself and be able to encourage others.

It will soon become clear that I doubt if American-Christians are prepared for changes that challenge our commitment to God and loyalty to each other. However, because God is God, I’m also an optimist and believe that He will enable all who are serious about the need for an invigorated Christian life.

This is not a message of doom and gloom. It speaks of light in the darkness; of hope in the midst of despair – for all whose deepest roots and most important sense of identity and purpose come from their relationship with God – the Creator Whom we know through Jesus Christ our Savior.

I trust that this material stirs within you the Proverbs 1:7 kind of fear which opens your heart to the realities of where the church is at, and then draws you toward God for instruction and correction. Please rethink your relationship with Him, if it causes you to retreat in fear.

As you read the **descriptions of what a revived church will look like**, please consider pursuing such a walk with God right now. We will experience many new and wonderful beginnings as we seek Him more deeply. It will be rewarding beyond description as we let go of the present, earthbound American-Christian model. We will enter into riches that will amaze us. We will find ourselves wondering how we got there, and God will tell us that this is simply what it means to live with our eyes upon Him – like Jesus did. It's almost that uncomplicated.

One of the delights of the Christian life is the experience of gaining insight. (Read Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-14.) A challenge though, is that sometimes "new wine" will need new wineskins. Many Christians will find it difficult to move beyond their comfort zones enough to enter into a deeper walk with God, and to more actively participate in what He is doing in the world today.

Here's a bottom-line thought that I hope prevails in your mind as you read, and I'll be repeating it. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by viewing current and upcoming events as a wake-up call which moves us toward being the people of God in the way He always wanted us to be. It wouldn't be anything new! If American-Christians were to take this to heart it would lead to repentance and new life in the church. This new life could extend the time of God's grace upon America; or empower us to stand firm through difficulties that will come as His grace is lifted because of our sin; or some combination of the two. Regardless, we win.

My mind and pen will never be able to craft a statement or express a series of thoughts that is complete in every way. I see in part and I speak in part, and both are only a tiny piece of the whole.

I welcome your response, be it affirmation, encouragement, challenge, correction, further insight or anything else that you believe God puts in your heart. May God bless you richly in your ongoing pursuit of what it means to be a son or daughter of the King!

Yours, and His,



Ken Stoltzfus (Sr.)

## Facilitating Discussion

Christians generally don't talk much about their faith in practical terms. We try to act "spiritual" and sometimes we discuss theological issues in a certain way, but rarely do we get personal and vulnerable about how the Gospel is being worked out in everyday life. I propose that even most small groups or cell groups function at a superficial level.

That needs to change if we're going to stand in the days ahead. We must embrace Colossians 3:16-17: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* Consider Ephesians 5:18-21, too.

And Hebrews 3:13-14 applies to us as well: *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.*

Every social group needs leadership, but I propose that in the institutional church we have become far too dependent upon organizational structure and positional leaders. It's time for the people of God to step up to the plate. We must believe and apply I Peter 2:5: *you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* We must become participants in the Kingdom of God, not just observers.

I believe that this material can serve you well toward that end. Here are several questions that will provoke discussion as a group works through it:

- What is the key point that is being presented in this chapter/page/ paragraph?
- Is it consistent with scripture?
- How does it correlate with our thinking up until now?
- Do we really believe that God works in these ways today?
- Do I feel despair or excitement as I read this, and why would I experience one emotion versus the other?
- What new insight have I gained from this discussion?
- What insight would you like to add to this discussion?
- In what way do you disagree with the author?
- How will I apply this to my life?
- How different would life be if we applied this principle?

## Part I

# The Battle of the Ages

From the time that Satan rebelled against God in heaven, followed by sin entering the human experience, there has been an ongoing contest between him and God for the heart of man. It will continue until Satan is finally bound and cast into the eternal Lake of Fire as described in Revelation 20:10.

**I groan inside as I struggle to express** the meaning of that truth. To view the human experience through this lens, brings life and our attempts to be Christian into focus in a new way. It is like looking through binoculars and adjusting the eyepieces to focus them. The view goes from blurred to clear in an instant. And something that was far off is now near.

The reason we aren't more like Jesus is that the compulsion that drives us is so different from His. His purpose was simply to do the will of God; and every action, response and choice was dictated by that premise. As He said in John 6:38: *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.* And in John 5:30 He explains why He could always get it right: *By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

However, because of the sin nature that we inherit, the premise that we move from as we attempt to find our significance and wholeness in life (which we'll talk about soon), is very different. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, we are condemned to live under Satan's rule until we choose to switch sides and receive new life through Jesus. We then begin a life-long process of learning *His* way.

**Many of us wear glasses** or contacts, without which we don't see things as they are. That wonderfully illustrates the spiritual side of life. Because of our sin nature we are born with faulty vision. We *don't* see things as they are because "things as they are" is based on God's truth and our view is shaped by Satan's lies.

That's why so many of the sayings of Jesus and the life He calls us to, are so hard to understand and experience. The Sermon on the Mount; the life principles of love, serving, forgiving, and suffering; His sayings about money and possessions and so much more that marked Him as "radical," are simply what it means to live for God in a world that is ruled by Satan. All of that is "normal," not radical,

according to how God designed things on the earth to work. It only seems radical, and even impractical, because we have come to accept the broken world we were born into as normal, and it isn't. It's the distorted view of life that we inherited because of our sinful nature.

**When we are born again** we have opportunity to see things as they are. The problem though, is that we still have a choice about which lens we look through. That's what Jesus is speaking of in Matthew 6:22-23: *The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!* Phew!

The reason we get so many spiritual headaches is that, although God has given us the possibility of new vision, we still insist on looking through the old lens to determine what is good for us and what is not. In John 7:16b-17 Jesus said that our willingness or unwillingness to do His will is what makes His teaching either clear or blurry: *My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17 If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.* Straight talk!

**The whole "Christian" thing then**, is about Jesus coming to earth; dying on the cross to bear the penalty for our sins; and His being raised from the dead on the third day by the power of God so that Satan's power of spiritual death over us could be broken. All who would subsequently learn of that Good News, and who chose to accept God's rescue plan, would be "saved." They are "born again." Their spirit is made alive and they are now able to live in relationship with God as He intends.

The assumption then is that one's outward life, which had previously shown that they were under Satan's control, would now show that they are serving God. What happened on the inside would be confirmed by what others see on the outside.

That choice totally impacts our years on earth and determines our eternal destiny. Learning to apply it in everyday life, and especially in a Christian culture that has not done well at defining what it means, is what this document is about.

It would be worth choosing God even if it were only for this life, because His way is so much better than Satan's; but when one considers that a million billion years is only the first day of "eternity" it *really* seems like the right thing to do!

## 1) The Cosmic Battle

God is good. He created a wonderful and perfect world and placed man in it. There was no sickness or anything else that could deprive man of total health, peace and joy – all of which were His full intention for mankind.

Man was created in the image of God and was given a spirit and the capacity of moral choice. In order for there to be moral choice, there needed to be good and evil. Satan is that evil. Everything in the world that is less than perfect is the result of Satan's influence, and man choosing Satan's way versus God's.

Man was created with a God-shaped hole. An emptiness of sorts. We must find our significance, purpose, and sense of wellbeing in someone or something greater than and outside of ourselves. We must give allegiance to a god – either God or Satan. There is no neutral ground. (Romans 6:16) Our wholeness cannot come from within us; from another person; or from anything created.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve's fellowship with God gave them the wholeness they lacked in themselves. As we know though, man's choice to sin broke his relationship with God and consequently he was compelled to seek wholeness as best he could, without Him.

Sin, is simply man's misguided and futile attempt to find wholeness. To fill the God-shaped hole in his soul. The "life" that he was created to enjoy, and which only God can truly give – but which now eludes him because of his separation from God.

**That hole creates a vacuum**, desperately sucking in everything that proposes to fill it. Both God and Satan make promises as they vie for our affection, and the choice is up to us. Each speaks from His/his nature but one speaks truth (because He *is* Truth), and the other speaks lies (because he is a liar and the father of lies). Each offers his own brand of "life" but one is genuine and the other is counterfeit. The contest is obvious as Christians declare themselves to be disciples of Jesus but struggle to be like Him. We can find it so difficult to practice the life that He offers and so easy to experience that which Satan offers under *his* rule.

This battle for the human heart might be called "The Cosmic Battle," because it originates in the cosmos. There is a spiritual world which is outside of the earth as we know it. It is the unseen realm that Paul identifies in Ephesians 6:12: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* (Also Romans 8:38, II Corinthians 10:3, 4, and Ephesians 1:21)

The spirit world may be unseen in one way, but it is obvious in another. Consider the conflict of powers that you see at work in individuals; in every social group; and among nations. Isn't it clear that something deep and sinister is at work?

## 2) A Cosmic Worldview

A worldview comes from one's collection of beliefs about life and the universe, and shapes how we see and interpret the world. It determines where we attempt to find our human wholeness and affects how we respond to people and situations – including national and world events.

Christians who have a Cosmic Worldview will experience life altogether differently than those who don't. We will have a realistic view of how events on the earth relate to the battle in the heavenlies, and will connect with the power and purposes of our sovereign God – thus finding our wellbeing in Him regardless of circumstances. *That*, is good stuff!

No disciple of Jesus could deny the existence of Satan. Even without the extensive Biblical material on him including the testimony of Jesus, there is enough evil in our world to convince any logical thinker that there is an enemy of good, among us. Without that, there would be no reason to be a disciple of Jesus!

Gratefully, we Christians know that in the end, God wins. Jesus has the last word. As Paul writes in Philippians 2:9-11: *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

**Meanwhile the battle rages**, and with increasing intensity as we advance toward final events in the Cosmic Battle. It has everything to do with everything. Aren't even issues like environment and animal rights taking on a spiritual flavor, often being expressed with religious fervor? Might this be happening because of man's desperate attempt to find significance and purpose outside of a relationship with Creator God?

This religious spin moves persons to circumvent the normal processes of disagreement and dialogue in the context of mutual respect, and opens us to extreme and irrational reactions which are not to be ignored.

**A wonderful benefit of embracing a Cosmic Worldview** is that it gives us a new lens to look through. A new perch from which to observe. Similar to a pilot climbing through rough weather, getting on top and looking down upon it, Christians whose lives are connected to God's agenda will observe and experience the events of the day altogether differently than their earth-bound brothers and sisters.

Isaiah 26:3, 4 describes such a person: *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. 4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.* We can have that peace regardless of what direction our nation is taking or who is in office.

### 3) God and the Nations

We think of nations as being sovereign entities whose existence and wellbeing are shaped by the will of man. That is true, but it's not the whole story because nations and their leaders can become pawns in the contest between God and Satan.

Consider Acts 17:26, 27: *From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.* It's clear, isn't it, that God is involved in the events of nations for the purpose of making Himself known?

Didn't God have His agenda, and Satan, his, in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus? Was Roman rule over the Jews at that time just a coincidence of history, or was it part of the setting that God formulated for Jesus' birth? Was Herod's determination to have Jesus killed as an infant, his idea alone, or was he provoked by Satan as part of *his* game plan?

Why did Hitler so hate the Jews and determine to exterminate them? Was that just his idea or was it part of a larger picture? Was he goaded by Satan to do such an awful thing as another expression of *his* battle with God? Was the timing happenstance or deliberate? Consider the reestablishment of Israel as a nation soon thereafter.

Is there any significance to the open hostility that is now being expressed by Iran and other Muslim/Arab leaders toward Israel? Is it part of Satan's agenda against the Jews? Are such events part of something bigger than national or political interests – or even oil? Will God have the last word and use for good what Satan meant for evil?

**Even when God allows a nation** to experience the consequences of its sins, it isn't only to punish them. It is also to make Himself known and to draw them back to Himself. In Ezekiel 14:1-4 He speaks warning to those who have rejected Him and in v5 He says: *I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.* Then there's vv 10a and 11: *They will bear their guilt - - 11 Then the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign LORD.*

God will always be about His business through nations, both good and evil. Think about how often He used them to bless or chastise Israel in Old Testament days. Embracing this perspective gives one a Cosmic Worldview – and a rock to stand on!

There will only ever be one Jewish nation, and **I am not saying that America** was a modern-day Israel, but I *will* propose that God did a deliberate and special thing in our country. I believe that He led in the founding of America, and then blessed us

with freedom and opportunity so that He could make Himself known to the ends of the earth through these resources. He does that sort of thing.

Except for the Jews, no peoples in history have been blessed in the measure that United States of America has been. I believe that we have prospered not only because of our moral and Biblical foundations and the benefits of democracy, but because we were a specific component in God's plan to take the Good News to the ends of the earth as part of the Cosmic Battle. It is true, that until recently most of the missionary and world evangelism effort has been carried out by American Christians.

However, change has come to our great land and we must prepare for what lies ahead. We need a Cosmic Worldview if we expect to stand. We must connect with God and His eternal purposes as the battle in the heavenlies intensifies. Satan wants us to find our significance and wholeness in the passing things of the world, and to thus be discouraged. As the days grow darker he will use fear of various kinds to attempt to manipulate us toward actions that would deny God and set us up to betray one another. Time will tell, if the thoughts that came to me on Oct. 10, 2008 (A Day of Repentance, Reconciliation and Restoration, [p61](#)) are from the heart of God.

I like how **Ezekiel 36:22-23** and similar texts represent the way *in* which, and the purposes *for* which, God works among the nations. None of us knows what lies ahead for America and the rest of the world. But let's have new "eyes to see and ears to hear." Let's embrace a Cosmic Worldview and start thinking more about Kingdom agenda, asking Him to reveal to us how and why He is moving among the nations. He is, and we get to be a part of that if we choose to!

Could we plead with Him to speak deeply to us, that we would be faithful to Him and become partners with him – to whatever end He has for us personally and as a nation? While we would hope that it will result in deliverance for America, we would not mandate that to God or make it a precondition to our focus upon Him. This, is about something higher. *Much* higher!

## Part II

### **The American-Christian Dilemma**

American-Christians are facing a dilemma. Most of us have been quite comfortable with our dual citizenship, i.e. as Americans, and as Christians and thus citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. The combination of our First Amendment right of religious freedom, and the fact that Biblical principles were woven into the fabric of America's culture, have historically worked together in a way that was supportive of Christianity.

Unfortunately, in recent decades, that has changed more than most of us want to acknowledge, and American culture is becoming antagonistic toward unapologetic Christianity. The terms "American" and "Christian" are conflicted in a way that we have not previously known. Americans who determine to truly be the Church, are increasingly faced with the need to reconsider the primacy of our two citizenships in terms of which most shapes our personal identity and family cultures.

#### 4) Change

Have American-Christians ever been as philosophically separated and emotionally vested in a national election as we were in 2008?

Doesn't the political battle today center around embracing America's historic moral, spiritual and ethical beliefs and practices – versus *replacing them* with those that are not only different, but contrary? This is not about *an* issue, it is about the overall foundational premises which define our culture and dictate our laws. Was the division that Abraham Lincoln had to address after the Civil War *that* profound?

**Certainly our nation's leaders** will make sincere attempts at unity and across-the-aisle cooperation, but the tremendous pressure from global expectations that they produce results, undergirded by the mandate given to Mr. Obama by the American masses, will likely compel his administration to move from their core values. It will also cause many normally more conservative voices in government to cower.

It seems to me that every necessary ingredient is present for a major change in how America, and the nations of the world, function. We have a critical, emotion driven need; the will of the masses; the leadership; and the absence of the values which would previously have prevented it. We don't need world-wide war; only the threat/fear of it is enough to move leaders to consolidate their power; and to prepare the populous to accept it. The until-now unthinkable, "one world monetary system" is assumed by many in power to be the logical solution as they view the global crisis.

Christians ought to be prepared for many far-reaching changes in American life as our leaders apply to the unprecedented needs in our world, the new and untested moral and political assumptions which now govern us.

However, while some may be tempted to point fingers at our current national leadership, we must remember that, while they are facilitators in a certain way, they are only expressing the contemporary mindset and the will of many Americans. It is humbling for us to admit that we could only get to this place because the Church has not been salty enough to preserve our historic values and maintain the blessing of God.

## 5) God and Country

Our nation was established by God-fearing men who founded it on Biblical principles. Faith in and dependence upon Him were essential ingredients to the freedom, opportunity and prosperity which followed.

The Church (capital “C”), that is, the Kingdom of God which encompasses all who have chosen to come to God through Jesus Christ, and who are living for Him, is without earthly boundaries. It is worldwide, and exists and functions under God at a level above nations or their governments.

In the United States of America, while *separate* in important ways, the institutional church (small “c”) and the State were also mutually dependent. Each supported the other. Each helped maintain the culture in which the other could thrive. That has changed and American-Christians are facing a dilemma, and choices that we’re unaccustomed to.

The division in the church and the nation over “the war,” and human sexuality issues is incredibly deep. A society’s response to abortion and homosexuality symbolizes its overall acceptance or rejection of the rule of God.<sup>1</sup> Those who defy God by snuffing out the life of innocent little ones who are made in His image, and whose respect for life is instead expressed toward trees and animals, have abandoned the most basic of human virtues.

Our nation’s refusal to consider creationism as a viable option for dialog in the classroom further defines how we juxtapose God and man. The fact is that all of creation was designed to function according to a divine plan. Everything from relationships to gravity to the solar system to economic principles. Certain things work and certain things don’t and God gets to say which is which. Those who refuse to acknowledge His creation design, and who think that they can make things work in their own way, sentence us to utter chaos. Today’s worldwide crisis is stark testimony to that and it has only begun.

Creationism establishes God as the Creator and thus as the God of history – past, present and future. Its rejection goes beyond the discussion of how physical matter came into being, and symbolizes our refusal to acknowledge the Creator God whose existence we would then logically be obligated to consider in all of life.

The church in America has been demonstratively ineffective in responding to these shifts in our country’s way of thinking. Never have our challenges been global in the way they now are. And never has America been so destitute of moral fiber and respect for godly values – and thus so incapable of bringing life-giving stability into our world.

<sup>1</sup> [See Footnotes, page 58](#)

## 6) What It Means

We can predict some of the eventual outcome of an actively pro-abortion, pro-gay American mindset where radical non-discrimination and anti-hate sentiment can easily evolve into including everyone except genuine followers of Jesus. The thing we can't reliably predict is when and to what extent it will happen.

Yes, American-Christians who support politicians who justify the sacrifice of some 50-million innocent lives on the altar of "right to choose," and who affirm their ongoing slaughter, have little right to expect God to continue to bless them. And we who defend life have so sold ourselves to love for the world that we've had little influence on the direction of our nation.

Our founding documents boldly declared America to be a people under God. The engraving of the Ten Commandments and other scriptures on public buildings further asserted who we saw ourselves to be before God, but we have now defiled ourselves. We will sooner or later have Ezekiel 36:23 to deal with: *I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.* And possibly we could replace "Jerusalem" with "America" in Ezekiel 5:5-6.

Christians should ponder the relevancy of Ezekiel 7:3b to America: *I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.* This phrase is repeated several times in nearby verses and it is a timeless principle.

**America deserves to experience the consequences** of having turned away from God, but only He knows when or in what measure He will withdraw His hand of mercy which has thus far restrained it. Wouldn't five-million abortions have been enough to bring judgment upon a nation that declares itself to be God-fearing? – in which case it could have happened decades ago!

American-Christians *have* been a preserving factor in our society but I suspect that we have become presumptuous about that. Our previous faithfulness only "covers" so much and then there's a price to pay. Ezekiel 14:13-14 is sobering: *Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, 14 even if these three men - Noah, Daniel and Job - were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD.* It won't work, for us to appeal to God on the basis of our past.

The release of our judgment will certainly be hastened if we waiver in our historic support of Israel. Genesis 12:2-3 is as true today as ever. And we will pronounce our own sentence if we take deliberate steps to further lower our defense of the unborn or our standards for acceptable sexual practices, and especially so if we mandate the acceptance of such by law.

## 7) Looking Ahead

It is obvious to anyone who has the courage to look, that Americans have already suffered great losses. Consider the attitude toward our freedom of speech including the reading of the Bible in schools, or even Christian students making a personal statement in class or at a school function such as sports events or graduation.

Think about the attitude toward a local government's Christmas displays. And the growing restriction of our freedom to publically declare what God says about certain sins. And then there are the vast losses that we have suffered in the collapse of our financial systems. Obviously we didn't take "9-11" seriously and one wonders how much further things need to go before Christians wake up!

I don't know if I'm a pessimist or a realist, but my sense is that the course of America is fairly well set. Our younger generation lacks the spiritual and moral values and absolutes that had guided our nation from the beginning. Even when we previously disagreed as Democrats and Republicans, it was basically over differences in the application of our foundational assumptions – not because one or the other rejected them.

Our new core values have reached nearly to the bottom of the taproots of those which had previously sustained us but which we are now abandoning. Said another way, we are now attempting to build on sand instead of rock.

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus speaks of **what we can expect next**: *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*

The principles which formerly guided our nation reflected the wisdom which is based on creation design. If our national leaders humbled themselves under the pressure of crisis and sincerely sought the heart of God, He would give them that wisdom and things would change dramatically. James 1:5-8 speaks of that: *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

Until that time, we should prepare ourselves for national policy and laws which set our nation adrift, like a ship without a rudder on a stormy sea.

If the situation is really this bleak, how did we get here and what can we do now?

**Part III****Opportunity Is - -**

Opportunity is to the soul what wine is to the body, that is, potentially addictive, intoxicating, and offering a false sense of wellbeing.

When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan won legal right to be the ruler of the earth. His game plan is to tempt us to satisfy the hunger of the human soul through partaking of things of the earth instead of through relationship with God. It's part of the ongoing battle between God and Satan for the affection and loyalty of the human heart.

## 8) I Saw - -

When Elaine and I started our ministry in Kenya in 1990, we bought locally produced groceries from a limited selection at small shops. They were adequate, but often not very tasty or attractively packaged. There were a few small, black & white TV's in Kenyan homes but little else in terms of such luxuries.

I was profoundly touched by the way in which our friends, who had so little in terms of the things of the world, found their sense of "life" by looking up. For many of my students, God was Provider for daily bread; money for school fees; and certainly for a new Bible. There was no other source. Life, including the satisfaction of their inner person, was defined by their relationship with Him. I saw contentment in the truest sense. It was a moving experience which influenced me deeply.

By the mid 1990's the scene had changed dramatically. Import restrictions were eased and a flow of goods from South Africa and Europe had begun. Modern shopping centers popped up all over the place for groceries, clothing and much more. We missionaries now bought our appliances in-country instead of shipping them over. I remember the first time I saw an array of name brand barbecue sauces and ketchups on the shelves in a recently erected mall – quite a departure from the local, red-colored corn starch that we had formerly known as "ketchup" there.

Cars were now streaming in from Japan. In 1990-91 my bishop showed me the plans for the new church building they were dreaming of. When I asked where the parking lot was, he looked at me, chuckled, and said, "We don't have cars." It was true. Only five years later most pastors and many others had cars.

**As goods flooded into the country** I began to see large color TV's (often tuned to soaps or fake American wrestling), along with video players, in the homes of our friends. Previously unavailable appliances and gadgets soon became life necessities.

And something changed in the heart of many Kenyans. I saw them lower their eyes and begin to look horizontally – to focus on the stuff of this world for their significance and wholeness. Opportunity can do that. It was sad to watch this transition in those whom I had so honored for their simple faith in God as their Source. They were now able to fill more of their soul hunger through things of the world. They became more like us and I was especially convinced of that when I learned that much of it was obtained by borrowing.

I saw a major shift too, in their motive for coming to America. In the 1970-80's numerous church leaders had come to the U.S.; studied; and went home to serve their church. They became the key leadership in the 100-plus congregations we served there. They had tasted of American opportunity, but because of a higher commitment had not imbibed and become addicted. Now however, having drunk more deeply of "stuff" in their own country, many Kenyan Christians sought and won green cards so they could come to America to stay – and to enjoy even more. Only a rare few came to study and then returned to serve their people.

## 9) The Challenge

“Opportunity” is one of our greatest challenges to spiritual vitality. Opportunity to accumulate “stuff” – and to earn degrees; gain position; increase power and more.

As with many gifts from God, it can enable us to be about His business but has equal potential to distract us from it. We like to address the awfulness of pornography and the effects of drugs and alcohol, but “the fat of the land” is even more destructive in the church and we don’t talk about it.

Isn’t there something sensual about opportunity? Doesn’t it sometimes suggest possibilities in somewhat the same vein as an attractive, provocatively dressed woman with just the right perfume? Can’t it connect with something in our inner being which demands either acquiescence or rejection?

Isn’t it the historic challenge of God’s people, as stated in Deuteronomy 8? Please read that and take special note of versus 11-20. How recently have you heard that used as a sermon text in a way which communicated a call to observable change in affections and lifestyle?

Obviously the opportunity that God gives us is not evil in itself, but it presents us with choices that determine if the outcome is good or bad. The core issue is whether it is a servant or a master in our life, which depends on where we look for our wholeness. If our eyes are on things of the world, and we try to satisfy our soul-hunger in them, opportunity quickly becomes a master. Anything that becomes our source of “life” becomes a god to us. If our wholeness is found in God, we will experience opportunity as a servant to our walk with Him.

**I John 2:15-17** is noteworthy in this discussion. Bear in mind that it was written to the church – to born again, Spirit-filled, sanctified and being-sanctified Christians!: *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

The Greek word translated “love,” is agape, meaning the highest form of Christian love and concern; the kind of love that God has toward us. Obviously there is a risk of the saints loving the world and the things of the world with agape love, or this wouldn’t have been written!

Verse 15 says that we have a choice between loving the world and loving God. It’s the Matthew 6:24 principle and it couldn’t be said more clearly. Any difficulty in understanding this truth is probably because of how hard it is to *accept* it.

James 4:4 speaks of how seriously God takes this: *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

## 10) Guilty as Charged?

God has given American Christians unprecedented opportunity, but what have we done with it? Where are our eyes? Who/what do we love the most?

One way to judge how much we love something is to consider how we would respond if we lost it. How much are things of the world the source of our significance, peace and overall sense of wellbeing? How much could we lose and still cheerfully praise God? What loss would cause us to question His love or even to turn our backs toward Him?

I say confidently that the daunting challenge that American-Christians now face is because of our agape love for the world, which has diminished us and made us spiritually impotent and unable to sufficiently “salt” our nation. We have been unable to recognize or respond to the growing trends in America because we were too preoccupied with indulging in them ourselves. We have joined others in defining the amount we could spend by the amount we could borrow.

Gadgets, electronics, the hardware of our sports and hobbies and more which were so wonderful and exciting one day, were boring the next and needed to be replaced with something even more exciting. And costly. Wiser than us, they too soon mocked us with their betrayal of the trust we had placed in them to make life good. “Vanity of vanities,” they shout. It’s all part of the Cosmic Battle.

America’s current challenges are not about Democrat/Republican, conservative/liberal, hawk/dove, gay/straight, Christian/Muslim or other convenient lines that we like to draw. The collapse of our nation’s moral and economic systems could not have happened without our unrestrained love for the world, Christians included.

Further, if I read Ezekiel 33:26 correctly I think there’s a good chance that we’ve had to rely on our sword in the measure we have, because of our lack of spiritual vitality. That’s not a statement about “the war” or about the Christian’s participation in the military. Nations have enemies and nations have armies, but isn’t there a way in which wars have helped bring our nation and our world to this place of turmoil, and is there a reason for that?

**What path does a nation walk** to go from being an incredibly blessed, God-fearing people, to those who glare arrogantly at Him by taking upon themselves the right to snuff out His gift of life in innocent little ones?

Abortion is the antithesis of love and respect for human life, representing the depravity of the human heart like little else. In a way which portrays his true nature, Satan was able to twist God’s gift of opportunity into a self-indulgent lifestyle in which abortion could be rationalized and justified. It perfectly represents the demonization of something which began as a gift from God, and even many Christians missed what was taking place. A society should think of its practice as nothing less grave than aggressive cancer in one’s internal organs.

## 11) If My People - -

I am fully aware of the wonderful truth of II Chronicles 7:14: *if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* Wait and see – as the sense of urgency increases in America there will be an accompanying cry from the church to repent so that God heals our land.

I see three problems here though. The first is that we're so in agape-love with the fat of the land that many won't be able to repent and break free of it's bondage on their own volition. Materialism is part of the DNA of our existence and we can't imagine life without it. We have a sense of entitlement as Americans and sometimes even more so as Christians. Some elements of the church have done us a disservice by placing a focus on "stuff" and making it a mark of spirituality. It is likely that opportunity will need to be taken from us, at least in some measure, before we will be able to repent deeply, en masse.

Secondly, the approach to repentance that we need is not one which moves us to repent so that God heals our land. We must humble ourselves before Him and confess our sin and declare that we will love Him and serve Him and declare Him good regardless of what happens in our nation. *That* is the worldview and the kind of repentance that could result in His healing our land, but I suspect it is unlikely to happen to any degree in the environment of continued, unfettered opportunity!

I cherish the possibility that because of the relentless mercy of God, He would recognize even our *attempt* to repent and would grant us a time of partial opportunity similar to His response to King Rehoboam in II Chronicles 12:1-12, so that we can continue to take the Good News to the ends of the earth<sup>2</sup>.

Finally, shouldn't our deepest grief be that we lacked the vitality that was needed to preserve the opportunities that God had granted us? And shouldn't our most passionate pursuit be in personal repentance, not as much to restore the nation but so that we again become the people of God? Wouldn't that reflect a Cosmic Worldview? Maybe it would be as part of a restored America, and maybe not.

It is true that **Americans have become intoxicated** by and addicted to opportunity, and that it has given us a false sense of wellbeing. Even Christians have allowed God's blessing to distance us from Him. A grandson suggested to me recently that maybe persecution would be good for the church in America.

Upon what foundation then, might we continue as American-Christians? If we hope to break free from the dark side of opportunity as long as such opportunity continues, and to live triumphantly when it is gone, we need to embrace a new premise upon which to build our lives.

<sup>2</sup> [See Footnotes, page 58](#)

**Part IV**  
**New Foundations**

What new foundations would American-Christians need if we were to move toward repentance and new levels of godliness, either now or in a situation where our opportunities and freedoms were limited? Here are several, and obviously they need to flow in harmony with each other:

## 12) A New Definition of Life

American-Christians need a new definition of “life”.

We’re speaking of the life that Jesus addressed in Mark 8:34-37: *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

The word “life” there is not the Greek “pneuma,” meaning breath or ongoing existence. It is “psuche,” meaning soul, heart, mind – the individual life, the natural, earthly life. Jesus is saying that we must die to our insistence that we define what makes life good for us, and instead allow God to do that. And as He says in v35, it is vain for us to try to make life good by doing things our way, anyway.

Excerpts on this text from Walvoord and Zuck’s “Bible Knowledge Commentary” include: “*Negatively*, one must deny himself decisively, saying no to selfish interests and earthly securities. Self-denial is not to deny one’s personality, to die as a martyr, or to deny ‘things.’ Rather it is the denial of ‘self,’ turning away from the idolatry of self-centeredness and every attempt to orient one’s life by the dictates of self-interest.” They continue: “*Positively*, one must take up his cross, decisively saying yes to God’s will and way.” Note their use of the word “decisively.”

Jesus is saying that **if we want to live a full life**; if we want to be all that we were created to be; we need to find it by dying to self-rule and following Him. We no longer decide for ourselves what is good for us.

In Matthew 5:6 Jesus says: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* The fact is, there is something about righteousness that satisfies our soul hunger in a way that unrighteousness can’t even get close to. God knows what we need; He will lead us into it; and we will be filled – *if* we hunger and thirst for righteousness instead of self-fulfillment. Come to think of it, “self-fulfillment” is a self-contradictory phrase, isn’t it!?

**Why are many Christians unfulfilled** – desperately trying one spiritual formula after another; running here and there to supposedly anointed preachers for a magic touch that will settle their restlessness; reading book after book after book but experiencing little change; repeating super-saint phrases and sayings which deny the reality of their inner struggle; faking spirituality; and sometimes accepting a hollow soul as their unfortunate lot for some reason? It’s because they’re looking in the wrong places for food for their soul!

In Romans 14:17-18 Paul says: *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.* Note

the sequence there: righteousness leads to peace, which leads to joy. Joy speaks of a full and satisfied soul, and it isn't based on circumstances or on having our way about things. It's simply from walking in righteousness, i.e. God's way. Isn't that neat – and wouldn't that bring radical change to the experience of most Christians and to the witness of the Church?

Seriously, wouldn't you agree that **we typically feel that we're living the good life** when we are having *our* way and getting what *we* want?

Why *do* the “blessed's” of Matthew 5:3-12, and Jesus' poignant words in 5:38-42, 6:19-34, 23:10-12 and countless other places seem almost irrelevant to our experience?

Why are there so many lonely and hurting people? Why is it so hard to love the unlovely? Why are most church fights power struggles instead of the theological or practical issues we say they are? Why is it so hard to get people to serve in the church, especially in humble or unrecognized chores? Why are there so many broken families among us? How many Christians suffer physically because of stress and anxiety? How often is depression the result of frustration and anger over not getting our way about something? Why are so many Christians overweight?

Why is James 1:19: *be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger*, an apparently unrealistic standard for many? Why is Romans 12:16-21 so difficult, and why can't we forgive more often – or at least release someone into God's hand to take care of per v19? Why does the spirit of Philippians 2:1-8 seem like something to be practiced on another planet – or at least by someone other than us?

In each case, isn't it because our thinking is shaped by the lie that doing things our way, and by having others give themselves to our need, will give us significance and make us whole and happy? In reality, we are responding to Satan who exercises power toward us to act selfishly and the result is the antitheses of true significance and wholeness. Can you think of a more graphic illustration of the meaning of words like ignorant, foolish or even stupid?

**Christians will make major advances** toward life as we daily take up our cross and die to self-rule as part of the process of increasingly finding our wholeness in God. Nothing that self-rule offers can come close to the sweetness of walking with God from the core of our inner being, as described in Psalm 1:1-3: *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.* That's pretty appealing, isn't it?

**At the very center of the issue** is the question of what source we look to, to fill the God-shaped hole that each of us bears as part of our humanity. It is the Cosmic Battle brought to earth and represents a contest that we face as long as we live.

### 13) A New Object of Worship

Worship is the act of giving ourselves to someone or something from which we expect to receive “life.” Whatever we look to, to fill the God-shaped hole in our soul, becomes an object of worship. In America, both opportunity itself and the prospects it offered us, have become objects of worship. Getting our eyes off of them and onto God, and finding life in Him, will be an elementary expression of repentance.

These words came to me in the mid 1980’s:

#### The Call

My desire for worship springs from the very core of My being  
 I have made you.  
 I have given you life.  
 Your life springs forth from My life.  
 I call you to come back to Me, to find your life in My life.  
 That, is worship!

To whatever or whomever you look as your source of life,  
 to that you give worship.

That which becomes the object of your heart's search,  
 that you worship.

That which you would embrace and cling to;  
 fearing that without it you would lose the meaning of life,  
 to that you offer worship.

That which most warms your heart by its presence,  
 or the assurance of its coming;  
 or leaves you feeling cold and lifeless in its absence,  
 or the fear of its loss,  
 to that you bow in worship.

You worship.  
 You will worship.  
 I have made you to worship.  
 You cannot refuse to worship.  
 But you chose the object of your worship.

**I call you to worship Me!**

## 14) The Object of Worship

These words came to me on June 23, 1985:

Every human worships.

Man was created with a need to worship someone (or something) beyond and greater than himself

Worship carries with it the expectation of reward,  
the sense of connecting with someone (or something) that will make one whole.

In worship, man offers up his heart, his life, allegiance, and affections,  
to God or to a god.

Man's highest calling, and his highest privilege,  
is to commune with God in worship.  
No other part of creation can commune with God.

A human is fully human only when he worships God.  
God would say "When you worship Me, the life that is in Me flows to you."  
Without that life, man is incomplete.

God seeks those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth, that is;  
in humility and sincerity, without reservation or pretense; in all of life, whether a  
"worship service" or a surrendered heart in work, play or family settings

He seeks those who will lay down their lives and yield their spirits up,  
to receive LIFE through His life - - rather than through their own life

By exalting Him as their Source, and giving Him that place in their life, they worship Him;  
because whatever becomes man's source, becomes his object of worship

But man has always had a problem with other gods,  
those who promise life without death.

"Life to it's fullest" they shout,  
"Through self-rule, self-satisfaction, self-assertion and self-fulfillment."  
"Get power, security, prestige, houses, money, fame and more, by developing your  
human resources and potentials."

They continue, "Find fulfillment by experiencing your senses and desires to the fullest."  
In that, they confess the object of their worship.

Man was created to have dominion over the earth, and to worship God.  
In refusing to worship God, and to recognize Him as the source of life;  
And in looking within himself and to the world around him to find life,  
man lowers himself by worshipping that which he was created to have dominion over.

## Part V

### The Foundation of a New Nature

A challenge for Christians is the ongoing surrender of our will to the rule of God. No matter how long we've been a Christian or how sanctified we think ourselves to be, there is something within each of us that doesn't like to be told what to do.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve simply moved with God. He defined "good," and *doing* good came naturally to them. However, in their rebellion they chose to have the power and the right to decide for themselves what was good. We will always have that power, but a key to our spiritual victory lies in our surrendering that right by becoming a bondservant to God and again doing things His way.

## 15) A New Nature

Adam and Eve's very nature changed when they rebelled against God. When they usurped His place of rule in their lives they unwittingly gave it to Satan and became naturally inclined toward evil (effective either at birth or at the age of accountability, lets not argue the point) in the way they were previously inclined toward good.

Jesus came to earth not only to forgive our sins, but to break our bondage to Satan and give us a new nature. When we are born again, we receive a new nature which is disposed toward good.

However, **the church has not done well** at teaching us what it means to be born again. It has often been understood as confessing our sins so that God doesn't hold them against us and send us to hell. After we're "saved" we're supposed to be good enough to stay in God's favor. There is little sense among Christians of a radical transformation from the inside out and of becoming a new person with the attitudes, affections and loyalties which express the new nature.

There are many things that Christians do; many places that we go; and many things that we set our eyes upon, that we know deep down inside are not godly – yet we retain for ourselves the right to declare them acceptable for us. *That* is what keeps us in defeat because retaining for ourselves the right to choose, instead of simply doing it God's way, is the chief characteristic and empowering feature of the old nature. It is a battle of wills between us and God similar to what we see expressed between a parent and child. It is the Cosmic Battle being played out in the heart of the individual.

**The deepest level of repentance** is not in turning from certain bad attitudes, habits or actions, no matter how evil they are. It is to turn from retaining the right to determine for ourselves what is acceptable and what is not. *That* is brokenness, i.e. acknowledging how destitute we are in ourselves and how unable to live godly and to experience true life by our own decision about good and evil. We surrender to God; our stubborn will is broken; and the life of God flows into and through us. It's the Psalm 51:17 principle: *The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.* (NLT)

Until we give up that right and humbly bow before God, the old nature will continue to unduly influence us. That act is essential to truly being born again versus merely confessing our sins. It is something that we do repeatedly as we grow deeper and deeper in our walk with God.

Submitting to God is not only our entry point into the Kingdom of God, it is crucial to our ongoing victory. As James 4:7 says: *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Don't we often try to resist the devil without first submitting to God?

## 16) Transformed Into the Image of Christ

“Born again” is a graphic depiction of what actually happens. We are truly born, again, but this birth is in the spiritual sense. (John 3:3-8) We come into the Kingdom of God as a spiritual infant, just as a newborn baby comes into the world physically. We must be cared for, nurtured, and taught – and we must learn obedience. There is an expectation that we will mature spiritually, as we do physically and emotionally.

Titus 3:5b combines the new birth (a moment, an event) and renewal (a process): *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.* The Greek word translated “renewal,” means “renovated.” Think about *that!* We are redeemed, or saved, not only from our sins which would have sent us to hell, but from the broken life which our old nature produced. We are now being renovated so that we express the wholeness of the new nature. Incredible!

We must learn to hear and respond to our new inner-man instead of following the patterns and habits of the old. There is a life-long process of “being transformed,” which Paul speaks of in II Corinthians 3:18: *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* Note the key word “being,” there, and the sense of progression into the new life.

The word “transformed” comes from the Greek “metamorphosis,” which is the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. It involves “a complete change of form, substance and structure,” and it takes time. For us, it continues from the moment we are born again until we take our first breath in heaven.

We must retrain our conscience so that it communicates God’s standards to us; and reshape our God-given, emotional and physical appetites, similarly to the process of children who have been addicted to candy, learning to enjoy vegetables.

We must renew our mind, as Paul says in Romans 12:1, 2: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.* Again, “transformed” is “metamorphosis,” and “renewing” means “being renovated.” They are a dynamic duo which operates in concert!

We must deal with **our idiotic notion** that sin is more satisfying than godliness. (Please *think*, before you react to that statement! Honestly, don’t we often think that being altogether “Christian” would be boring and dull? How ready *are* we to totally abandon fleshly desires?)

Truthfully, food, and the end result of eating it, are more rewarding when nutritious food is taken in appropriate quantities and eaten with delight instead of wolfing it down. Pure sex is indescribably more satisfying than perverted sex – notwithstanding the truth that there is pleasure in sin for a season. Serving others is more deeply

satisfying than demanding that others make us feel good. We must “reset” our thinking in many areas, and it’s a process!

**A proper understanding and experience** of being born again, followed by being transformed into the image of Christ, is powerfully life-giving. Unfortunately, Hebrews 5:12-14 (NAS) describes many Christians: *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. - - - 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.* Note the point of being trained by practice!

How long would it take you to **compose a list** of ungodly attitudes and habits that are regularly practiced and unchallenged among born again Christians? Sins like slander, gossip, complaining, lust, jealousy, selfishness, judgmentalism, pride, gluttony and materialism. Some are more obvious than others but all are overt violations of holiness. We all have areas of need and as James 3:2a says: *We all stumble in many ways.* None of us are qualified to “cast stones” at others.

And how about a list of godly attitudes and habits that we ignore on a regular basis, without consequence? Virtues like love, mercy, forgiveness, patience, forbearance, generosity, servanthood, servant leadership, husbands loving their wives, wives submitting to their husbands and much more. As we’re told in James 4:17, *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

We will need to actively choose God’s rule again and again as the new nature within us is challenged by people and events around us. It’s a struggle sometimes, but the only people who don’t struggle are those who sin without a struggle, and dead people.

When the new nature rules – if God says “it’s good,” it’s good! If He says, “too much,” it’s too much. If He says “it’s bad,” it’s bad. It’s a wonderful truth that the more often we chose God’s way, the more natural it becomes to us! (Romans 6:19)

I like the **definition of “total commitment”** that I heard years ago; “To be totally committed is to have committed all of myself that I know, to all of God that I know.”

We can only apply what we know. As long as the church presents a distorted concept of what it means to be born again, and accepts as normal the consequence of that, Christians will continue in an impoverished state. We cannot build a dynamic Christian experience on a diminished theology and watered down expectations of what “Christian” means. The church today desperately needs to understand our humanity; the meaning of “born again;” the imperative and process of growing into Christlikeness; and the power that is available to help us.

Paul had the same concern for the church in Ephesus. Please read Ephesians 1:17-23; feel Paul’s heart; and ask God if he would write similarly to you, today.

## 17) Filled with the Spirit

While we might give different meaning to the words, Christians usually agree that we must be “filled with the Spirit,” as commanded in Ephesians 5:18b.

God intends that His Holy Spirit be actively involved in every aspect of life. For openers, it is He who convicts us of sin and leads us through the born again process and into the life of the Kingdom of God. I Corinthians 6:11b says: *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* And then there are countless scriptures that speak of the work of the Holy Spirit to instruct, cleanse, assure, sanctify, heal and more.

**The Holy Spirit’s work** is also to equip and empower us for fruitful service. Note the prayer of Jesus in John 17:16-19: *They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.* Jesus is sending us into the world for the same reason that the Father sent Him – that is, to make God known to the lost.

Something that we often miss is the connection between being sanctified, and dedicating ourselves to God’s agenda. But the two are inseparable and if we are truly sanctified we will be set apart *from* the world, *to* God.

In Acts 26:18 Paul recounts Jesus’ call on the road to Damascus. He was: *to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.* He goes on to say: *20b that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.* (NAS)

Being “saved” is not just an escape from hell. It’s being saved *from* all that Satan’s domain represents, *to* all that God’s domain represents. It assumes that we will engage with Him in the Cosmic Battle in whatever way He calls and equips us to. If you were a salesman for a luxury car dealer, he probably wouldn’t be happy if you just paraded around in the expensive monogrammed pullover he gave you, and watched potential customers come and go all day.

**In Acts 1:5 and 8** Jesus connects the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with our being empowered for ministry: *5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. - - 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

That’s powerful, but before we go any further we need to know that an understanding of the Holy Spirit centers on the issue of Lordship. If Jesus is truly Lord of our life after we are born again, we will need the active work of the Holy Spirit to help us grow in Christ; to live victoriously and joyfully; and to serve Him effectively. That is the only context in which a discussion of what it means to be

filled, or baptized or whatever else you call it, in/with/by the Holy Spirit, can have real meaning!

Many Christians go through life with little awareness of the Holy Spirit, because they don't *need* Him to live at the spiritually mundane level they accept for themselves. However, when we declare Jesus, "Lord," and determine to live dynamically for Him and serve Him effectively, we'll feel the need for the Spirit's help. (And incidentally, the Holy Spirit is "He," not "it." He is the third person of the Trinity.)

**To those who lean away from** the supernatural gifts of I Corinthians 12-14 and elsewhere, I acknowledge that there is a common and unfortunate non-connection between the Charismatic/Pentecostal definition of being filled with the Spirit, and the ministry it is intended to effect. Too often, certain gifts are taken as marks of spiritual maturity (which they are not), and too rarely is "the baptism" connected to the overall surrender to His Lordship which Jesus would have assumed here.

However, I Corinthians 14:37-40 offers both affirmation and instruction to those who do embrace all of the spiritual gifts: *If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

**In our years in Kenya**, Elaine and I were privileged to concurrently serve a very Pentecostal denomination, and a non-Charismatic mission. We could do that without talking out of both sides of our mouth, because they were united on the things that mattered even if they strongly disagreed on secondary issues.

Each knew the other, and both knew of our dual service, but while they might not have enjoyed sharing a cup of tea they were deeply enough committed to God's work that they both freed us to serve the other.

**I have on many occasions** over the decades partnered in ministry with persons from both sides of the "charismatic" fence. Honestly, there has never been a pattern of which was more effective. Effectiveness came from a heart yielded to God accompanied by love for those who needed to know Him.

To our shame we only rarely see the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit blended in the way they were in Jesus. Our inability to model His life in that way has been at incalculable cost to the Kingdom of God.

In the end, it's not our theology of the Holy Spirit that makes the difference. It's whether or not we are "filled with the Spirit," which is evidenced by our surrender to the Lord Jesus and dedication to all that His "name" means in personal life and ministry. His kingdom will be advanced if we will do that, and if we're humble enough to bless others even if their "take" on this or other issues is different. And when we're in revival mode those things won't matter!

## 18) A New Identity

Consider the prayer of Jesus in John 17:11-16. Note how He speaks of our being *in* the world but not *of* the world. We are here physically, but our most important identity, and our source of provision, hope, joy and all that makes life good, are not found here. They are in the Kingdom of God.

We are to be “aliens and strangers” as Peter says in I Peter 2:11 (NAS): *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.* This mindset is a prerequisite to our fulfilling I Peter 2:9 which we will consider soon.

Wouldn't you agree that the typical American-Christian has little sense of living here as an alien or stranger? Aren't many predominantly earth-minded? Yet isn't Kingdom-identity a bottom-line ingredient to our successfully living as the people of God? And wouldn't that help a lot when change comes and diminishes or removes the opportunities and freedoms that we have depended upon?

Christians who view their years on earth from an earthly perspective will be dismayed by things to come. So much that defines “life” for them will be at risk. Money, jobs, position, power, security, safety, preserving Christian institutions and more will be threatened by coming events. They will easily slide into compromising their faith and betraying their brother.

Conversely, Christians who have a Cosmic Worldview will *not* be dismayed. Nor will they be as likely to compromise their faith and their brothers. It's the Hebrews 11 life-view which simply says, “First things first.” Is it possible that those saints will become our brothers and sisters, and examples of faithfulness who inspire us to faithfulness ourselves, rather than just figures of Bible history? Read it and be honest about how closely (or distantly) the heart of the average Christian in America correlates to theirs.

**I am an American citizen and gratefully so.** I have lived in Africa and traveled a lot elsewhere. There's no place I'd rather call “home.” No flag I'd rather fly. But something which grips me in a much stronger way is my identity as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. *That*, is my deepest source of significance and purpose now, and my home forever. That will stand me in good stead if/when things “go down” in America.

If we have gone wrong, how could it have happened? Simply put, we have not lived here as aliens and strangers, and consequently we were subverted by the power of opportunity. Our identity has been much more as Americans than as citizens of the Kingdom of God. In times to come we will need a new identity – a new definition of who we are, if we are to stand firm. There's no better time to start than now! We could do it simply because we sense God's call to draw near to Him, without regard to world events, or because we see the need of it in light of approaching change.

## 19) A New View of Blessing

Why does God bless His people? Consider I Peter 2:9 (NAS): *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Notice the “so that,” there. Why does God bless and prosper an individual, a family, church, business or nation? A primary purpose is that through it, He would be made known to others. Certainly God delights in expressing His kindness and generosity toward those who love Him, for their enjoyment, but there’s more and the better we understand it the better it seems!

I still have my old, green covered “Living Bible” from the 1970’s, with II Chronicles 16:9a underlined: *For the eyes of the Lord search back and forth across the whole earth, looking for people whose hearts are perfect toward Him, so that He can show His great power in helping them.* Yes, *that’s* His heart – to show His power and His goodness by blessing us. Its part of the Cosmic Battle and it’s a win-win-win thing for us; for Him; and for those who see His blessing upon us and are thus drawn to Him!

**Truth be known,** Christians who receive God’s blessing in a spirit of humility, and who then practice generosity, live much fuller lives than those who squander His blessing on their egos, soulish pleasures and efforts to assure security for the future! It’s sort of like comparing a stagnant, mosquito infested swamp to a vibrant, fish-filled lake which overflows to bless countless others downstream.

Applying that to America, I believe that God blessed us not only so we could live well ourselves, but to make Himself known to the ends of the earth. He gave us previously unimaginable financial and technological resources, and freedom. We have had all that was needed to take the Good News to every nation, tongue and tribe in the world, in the language which speaks to their hearts. We have done that in some measure, but typically in a way that was secondary to living the self-centered American dream. A humble appraisal of the situation could only lead to the sad conclusion that we have essentially squandered God’s blessing.

As long as our eyes are on the earth and things of the earth, we will view blessing with an earthly mindset. As long as we look there to fill the hunger of our soul, we will receive God’s blessing into selfish hands “*where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.*” (Jesus, Matthew 6:19)

However, the moment we lift our eyes toward God and view blessing from *His* perspective – all that He has entrusted to us takes on new and exciting meaning. It is elevated above the blemishes of this world and reflects the sparkle of eternity. It’s an explosive, ecstatic, exuberant, invigorating experience which awakens something inside of us and calls for more! There’s nothing like the warm touch of His hand on your shoulder as He whispers: *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been*

*faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*, as in Matthew 25:21.

What we're talking about here is the purpose-driven life which emanates as naturally from a Cosmic Worldview as fragrance does from roses. One where our significance and life-purpose are based on our being joined to the eternal purposes of God – Who is Life itself; the author of life; and the giver of life to all who humbly seek Him.

**Acts 4:29-35** is instructive in this discussion. Read it and feel the excitement; the power; and the outcome. Don't we crave those results? Could that be a model for us? The difficulty however, lies in v29 where they identified themselves as slaves/servants/bond-servants (depending on your translation). The mindset of being servants *of* God and thus servants *to* those who need to know Him, militates against the typical American-Christian mentality. Something within us is reluctant to welcome the title of "servant."

If we were to embrace a new view of blessing, we would be able to do far more with far less. Every good thing from God would be received in a spirit that would allow Him to multiply it in a way that gives Him glory and us joy – and which draws the hearts of others to Him. *That* is how you feed over 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. We might need to do that.

**An after-effect of this kind of life** is that, having connected with that which is real, anything less would become distasteful and even disgusting to us.

## Part VI

### The New Look

What would the church look like if we were to embrace a Cosmic Worldview; truly repent of our agape-love for the world; and begin to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind?

For openers, to “confess” means to agree with a charge against us. To “repent” is to then turn around and go in the opposite direction. It’s the Ephesians 4:22-29 response where something negative is deliberately replaced by something positive. Christians often try to stop doing wrong without replacing it with the opposite, and then we wonder why we don’t have the victory! In this case our love for the world would be replaced by a love for God, in what would become an extreme makeover from the inside out.

Here is some of what the church would look like after deep repentance. But why would we wait until troubles come, to ask God to begin to work these virtues, attitudes and practices in us? This is what He *always* wanted Christians to be! Unfortunately it will probably take the involuntary loss of our freedom and opportunity to get us to look toward Him enough to find the instruction and the strength to change, but life would be indescribably richer if we were to humble ourselves and pursue Him even now.

Further, I believe that as fear rises in America, many who are not now walking with God will look toward Him for hope. But how will they find Him? In the church? I’m sorry, but I believe that too often Christendom in America has given others reason to not want to be like us. Haven’t we frequently been judgmental, hypocritical, superficial, and/or legalistic? Have we shown them that we are Christians – by our love and unity?

Forgive me if that offends you, but please try to understand my heart before writing me off. I just don’t know how to say it differently.

It is imperative that Christians in America take seriously our need to accurately represent God to those who don’t yet know Him – and that will require major change in the church as we now know it.

## 20) The Mark of Authenticity

Love is to the sphere of human relationships what gravity is to the universe; being the unseen force which keeps all in harmonious motion according to creation design; and the absence of which creates disorder and devastation.

There is **nothing more difficult** for the old nature, nor more natural for the new, than love. Nothing better authenticates one's testimony of being born again.

If the church were to truly repent and turn to God, love and the fruit of the Spirit in general (Galatians 5:22-23) would displace works of power, spiritual gifts, possessions, doctrinal correctness, conformity to rules and other criteria which we now accept as marks of spirituality. As Jesus said in John 13:34-35: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

Consider the power of love. It was because of love that Jesus became our Savior. Even when we were still ugly sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7-9) But it's also true that our agape-love for the world, instead of for God, is what got us into this fix in America. Love is powerful whether it is used in a godly way or otherwise.

**Christian love is powerful for two reasons.** First, it proves God's presence in us because nothing else could set us free from ourselves enough to give love in this way. Secondly, it touches the deepest need in others and draws them toward God in a way that nothing else does.

To love is to give. (For God so loved the world that He – gave!) We can only love others in the measure in which we have opened ourselves to God and received *His* love, thus finding our significance and wholeness in Him and being set free from selfishness. It is as Jesus said: *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.* (John 14:23) When we're born again and filled with the Spirit, the God-shaped hole in us is filled with His love for us – and overflows to others.

We love God because He first loved us. When we truly believe that God loves us (even “me,” in spite of - - -), our inner defenses come crashing down. We surrender to Him, He makes us whole – which enables us to give love to others.

**Our honest assessment** of how misdirected our love has been, and of how badly we have betrayed God by loving the world, would produce remorse that would totally transform the church. It would reflect the penitence of II Corinthians 7:11.

And here's something else it would do. It would humble us and help us love and extend mercy to even the most broken people He brought to us, knowing that they could hardly have failed Him any more than we have! What would *that* do to the witness of the church?

## 21) The “Stuff”

Certainly we need to be responsible stewards of what God has entrusted to us. We don't just recklessly give it away. But there's also something to be said for the words of Jesus in Luke 12:13-21. American-Christians *have* laid up treasures on the earth in a way that is directly contrary to His words here and in Matthew 6:19-24.

If we repented deeply, we would begin to divest ourselves of hundreds of millions, and even billions of dollars of hoarded personal wealth and would pour it into making God known to the ends of the earth. (That's what He entrusted it to us for!)

Every prisoner could hear about God's love. Orphans and widows would be cared for in a Biblical way. Pregnancy Care Centers would have funds to serve women in need; to communicate the realities of abortion and post abortion; and to minister to those who have made that terrible mistake. Missions would be able to reach into the darkest corners of the earth with the light of God's Word.

Hands of mercy would never be empty as they reach toward those who have been devastated by natural disaster and war.

Today about 200 million people do not have God's Word in their own language and it would sooo please Him for us to do more about that. We could, and it would only take a billion dollars to have translation work in progress in the remaining 2300 languages.

**“Generosity” would be redefined** and would be based more upon what we kept than what we gave. We might regularly buy a few extra groceries to share with someone in need, or slip some dollars into the hand of one whose need God shows us. We would embrace the saying of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Anabaptists: “What is mine is the Lords when my brother has need.” Giving would become as natural to us as hoarding is now – and it would be a whole lot more fun!

Christians would use the gifts, abilities and resources which God entrusted to them, to bless others. Entrepreneurs would quietly do what was innate to their business, to extend the Kingdom of God both locally and around the world.

We would become more discerning about where we gave, too. We would give more to those who express God's heart to the broken and destitute, and less to fill the coffers of already rich leaders of glamorous ministries who have tickled our ears and soothed our consciences about our wealth.

The ultimate test for many would be in Luke 18:22: *You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.* I'm not sure how many American-Christians Jesus would say that to, but He would probably at least ask many of us to give to others in such measure that we would need to depend on His provision for our future. Doing *that* might just be what we need to break our bondage to materialism.

The magnitude of our personal debt reveals the depth of our materialism and our lack of godly contentment. Even worse, we have accepted credit card interest rates

which violate any sense of godly financial responsibility. Our debt will be one of the tools that Satan uses to tempt Christiana toward compromise in a time of trial.

As we repented we would also find ourselves **taking steps toward “simplicity.”** That’s a very subjective word and it is relative to each person’s situation, but every one of us could move toward finding more of our wellbeing in our walk with God and less in what we have formerly trusted. I understand how tough that is, but I also understand the reward of being set free, little by little. Every step toward God frees me to take a step away from the world and the things of the world – and that is a wonderful thing!

I regularly rub shoulders with “plain folks,” i.e. Amish and conservative Mennonites. They have a certain advantage over many of us because they have already learned how to say “no” to many of the things that the rest of us consider essential. They have drunk less deeply of opportunity and are not as intoxicated by it.

That is commendable, and while plain dress and other symbols of simplicity have potential to remind us of and give testimony to our commitment to God, I would respectfully caution them in this way; “Please be aware of your vulnerability to depending on your plain dress, simple lifestyle or other symbols of separation from the world, to make you truly men and women of God. Beware of the dangers of giving yourself to a religious culture which becomes a substitute for heart surrender to God and finding your life, identity, and spiritual security in Him alone. It’s a heart issue and it comes down to one thing and only one thing – one’s relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. Creating and obeying rules which are designed to increase your chances of winning or maintaining God’s favor will actually distance you from Him if they move you from a faith-based relationship to a works-based religion.”

**Wealth would lose its ability** to automatically give people respect and power in the church. We would now honor those whom God honors, i.e. those who serve with humility; who give without needing to receive in return; and who are otherwise marked by Christlike character – without regard to their financial status in the world. *That* would be radical!

**The church would be exponentially more powerful** and effective as we turned our agape-love away from the world and toward God. We would find ourselves serving Him in dramatic new ways. As we were set free from bondage to the world and the distortion and clutter that it brings to our life, we would see with clear eyes; hear with open ears; think with unclouded minds; and move with brave new hearts and an untainted conscience. We would be empowered by God Himself and would go into all the world in a way that brought Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 together as we have never known.

## 22) The Church

Pastors would prepare the flock for hard times, equipping us to look to God for our significance, hope and provision. They would focus on our *relationship* with Him – far beyond a set of beliefs or practices; religious culture; or obedience to rules.

They would challenge us to pursue meaningful, sustainable, trust relationships with other Christians, as discussed in Chapter 27-29.

Overall, the primacy of the church (the institution) would yield to the urgency to build the Church (the Body of Christ on the earth, a living organism bearing His image; led by the Holy Spirit; and dedicated to His agenda). Our focus on the institutional church, that is, our denominations, facilities, programs and so forth would become secondary. They would become servants and not masters in the overall scheme of things.

That would bring profound change. As I've said and will continue to say, this kind of shift would move us toward what we really ought to have been all along.

**We would respect our pastors** and give them a place of influence in our life, and oversight in our relationship to the institution. We would give them the role of “shepherd” to us and invite them to actively lead us into a deeper walk with God. We would seek men who come alongside us and nurture our walk with God, and would move away from those who try to play God to us. (A pastor has authority “over” you in your relationships and activities in the institutional church, but some inappropriately view themselves as needing to be between you and God in your spiritual pilgrimage.)

We would also want to be prepared for the day in which the pastor might not be there.

There is a reason for the large and growing **non-churched Christian community**. The church and the Church *can* be two very different things. It *is* true that the institution sometimes hinders Christians even when it intends to do otherwise. However, while I've read some of the books and heartedly concur with most of the observations, I don't see that they validate the conclusion that many reach, i.e. that we only need God and don't have to be in deliberate fellowship with others.

The Church is truly a body, with parts, and those parts must function in harmony with each other for their mutual benefit. Paul speaks of that in I Corinthians 12:12-31 and it is a foundational principle of godly living and fruitful ministry. We were made for fellowship. The Greek word *koinonia*, which is often translated into our English “fellowship,” means to partner with others or to share in life with them.

You may need to step out of a given institutional church if it is a hindrance to your pursuit of the heart of God, but beware of the potential for an attitude of superiority to tempt you to think that you don't need to be in active, give-and-receive relationship with others in the Church.

Why have Christians always gathered together when persecution came, often in secret and under threat of death if caught, sometimes in caves or under a tree in the forest? It's because we need each other. We need the variety of gifts. Each of us contributes to the other.

We humans so often swing from one excess to another. In this case the awareness of how deeply the church has become an institution to be preserved, instead of a life-giving body to serve, has moved some to deny the necessity of the gathered local Church. The two extremes are equally unhealthy and neither will enable Christians to stand in the day to come.

I know that none-churched Christians tire of being reminded of Hebrews 10:24-25: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* The fact is, "The Day" is approaching and God gave us that scripture for a purpose. It is not an isolated principle, but is harmonious with all of scripture; with man's creation design; with the New Testament Church model; and with the nature of the Godhead Itself!

Consider also Acts 2:1-4, 2:42-47 and 4:23-33. Note the results of the gathering of believers who were united in their pursuit of the heart of God, and who were willing to abandon their individualism in that effort. That is *Church*, and it won't happen in today's typical American church or in the non-churched community.

A recurring theme in the church today is "**the coming revival in America.**" However, I see two problems in the way it is often portrayed. First, Christians seem to assume that this revival is for "them," meaning the unsaved, and I insist it is for us first. As we're told in I Peter 4:17: *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* American-Christians have little to say to the world until we clean up our own act.

Secondly, I don't believe that the coming revival is to restore America. It is to restore the Church.

There are "prophets" among us who declare peace, prosperity and revival for America, with little pain or personal cost. They present no urgency to repent deeply now or to repair the breaks in the walls of our hearts and of the church. The message is that we need to pray and have faith and God will do it. Ezekiel 13:3-10 speaks of such prophets and what He thinks of them!

## 23) Unity

Denominational distinctives which now separate us would fade as we embraced a Cosmic Worldview. Unity would become that which Jesus prayed for in John 17:22-23, which is based on oneness of will and purpose.

It would be rooted in our common surrender to our Lord Jesus Christ at the foot of the cross, which is not at all related to the ungodly inclusiveness of our day. We would unite in our commitment to make Him known and to expose the enemy, and would be empowered by His presence as we together went about His business.

We would lay down the secondary issues which now separate us. Theological differences, cultural expression, our “thou shalt not’s” and more would become preferences which help individuals understand and walk out their faith, but would not divide us. When pressed, most Christians agree that these are not “in or out” issues regarding one’s presence with God forever, so why do we act like they are?

In authentic unity we would recognize that our personal theological package is only part of the expression of God’s heart in our community. No one denomination or local assembly fully represents Him. We would begin to bless those whom we have previously viewed as our competitors or even adversaries. We would humbly give and receive in relationships with others, as long as they embrace the basic tenets of Christianity and sincerely seek to live for Jesus. The basic tenets are “those which orthodox Christianity has agreed on through the history of the church.”

We might enjoy a given **Bible translation** but would maintain unity with those who chose another one. The “King James only” element of the church is one of the most divisive. It disregards the fact that billions in the world don’t even read English, and that the translation is no more authorized by God than other translations.

No translation is perfect, including the King James, and God is able to make Himself known to all who seek Him regardless of which they use. It is certainly true that more people have been driven away from God and the church by the dogmatism and separatist attitude of KJV only folks, than have been kept in truth by its virtues.

Many trustworthy and enjoyable translations are available.

**Here’s what Jesus said** about the effect that such unity would have upon the myriads who want to know God but are confused and turned off by the bickering among Christians: *I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* John 17:22, 23

“Glory” is the measure of excellence that something has above that which is around it. When we Christians humble ourselves and bless each other, we will be marked by glory that will convince the world of God’s love. They will know that nothing short of His power could have done that and they will want Him too!

## 24) Bible Reading and Prayer

Many Christians suffer debilitating guilt because of an inadequate devotional life, and there are certainly several causes for that.

I believe the main reason is that reading the Bible and talking with God are seen more as Christian duties than as normal and appealing components of our everyday experience. Further, they are part of the spiritual or Cosmic side of things, which we live with little awareness of. We are conscious of the earthly dimension and often don't connect the two except in times of crisis.

In true revival we will center on God, and communion with Him will flow naturally as we find our significance and purpose in Him. We will recognize that we are truly His offspring and will *"live and move and have our being in Him,"* as the writer says in Acts 17:28.

He will be the beginning and the end of our day and the sustaining power between. Our minds will go to Him in periods of personal need or concern for others, and in times of blessing and joy, and we will talk with Him.

We will pause for a few minutes to chat with Him through our day as one now meets a friend at the proverbial water cooler. Reading the Word will be as normal as sitting down to read the paper or watch the news "for a few minutes." It is essentially impossible to walk victoriously without regular, personal, fellowship with and worship of God. The battle is simply too strong!

We will do it because of the hunger of our soul, realizing that we are unable to sustain a level of spiritual vitality without it any more than we can maintain physical strength without food. As our eyes are raised toward God we will want to partake more and more deeply of the riches He offers to those who worship Him. It will become privilege instead of duty. Jesus needed that – how much more do we!

**God's Word will become active and alive** to us as it connects with our everyday life in a way it never did before. The Old Testament will transition from being primarily history, to become a practical, instructive and life-giving account of how God moves among man – then and now. He will speak to us deeply about Himself; us; and the world we live in. It's good stuff!

Time with God will become time with a friend. An encourager. One who makes life better for us and Whose presence warms us to the core even in otherwise chilling circumstances. As God's Word and our communication with Him become natural to daily life, Christians will be released from the frustration and guilt of the ugly "should" which now plagues so many.

**Intercessors** will be recognized and honored. We will see them as a ministry among us and each believer will move freely in the level of prayer-fellowship with God that He calls us to, without comparing ourselves among ourselves.

## 25) A New View of Suffering

Troubles and suffering are typically viewed as inconvenient and undesirable interruptions to the normal Christian life of health, comfort and abundance.

They are seen as inherently negative and the assumption is that we deserve better. A feeling of guilt or shame typically accompanies them because of the thought that we must have done something wrong to deserve them. Our attitude is based on a self-centered, earthbound perspective and our hope is to pray them away quickly.

A revived church will see **suffering from God's point of view**. It might represent His purifying fire to set us free from affections/addictions which hinder our advancing with Him. I Peter 4:1, 2 says: *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

Suffering could be part of God equipping us with insights and resources so that we can serve others better, as Paul says in II Corinthians 1:3-7. Maybe it is His act of mercy to get us ready for something that, in His foreknowledge, He knows lies ahead. Possibly we've made some bold statements and He's proving us. Consider I Peter 1:6, 7: *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

There are many, many reasons that God allows us to experience difficulties and they take on an altogether different perspective when we have the humility to look at them through a Cosmic Worldview and from a humble heart.

**James speaks from a Cosmic Worldview** when he says: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.* That's about as relevant to the American-Christian experience as Matthew 5:10-12 when read through the lenses of the old nature and its earth-bound perspective.

However, James isn't playing with our minds. He continues: *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* (James 1:2-4) And then there's v12: *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.* That's a fantastic ending but even then the process is one that many Christians don't want to think about too much!

Elaine and I have walked through some deep waters through the years. We have come to see that God is always, *always* ready to make something beautiful out of something ugly. It is as Joseph said in Genesis 50:20: *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done.*

Suffering is a servant of joy. The best things in life come through the most difficult things in life. If men take something from you, God will give you something better. The refiners' fire is hot, but having some of the chaff burnt off is liberating.

**Tearing free from our agape-love** for the world, and from childish expectations in our relationships with others, is something like ripping a very sticky bandage off of a very hairy chest. However, as we “find ourselves” in relation to God and things eternal, stuff of the earth will have diminished appeal and their loss will become less painful. We will even be able to accept the rejection of people, including friends and family, because of the measure in which we have experienced the acceptance of God and found our significance in Him. It might be useful to consider that possibility.

I believe that suffering will become a practical subject in the days ahead, and it will be much to our advantage if we can begin to embrace a God-perspective toward it. The thoughts that came to me on Oct. 10, 2008 ([page 61](#)) confirm that to me, but you need to judge for yourself if they seem to be from the heart of God.

**I Peter 5:6-11** offers some key truths which God showed Elaine, and she passed on to me in a very difficult time in 1979. They have become a rock for us to stand on several times along the way and they could become the same for you. *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

I can't conclude without **I Peter 2:20b-23**: *20b But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* Isn't that an awesome, powerful, deeply touching testimony? And isn't it only possible for those who have a Cosmic Worldview?

I've not given many lists of scriptures in this material but I will here. Read through this series and see what it does to your perception on suffering: Psalm 119:65-77; Prov. 17:3; Isa. 53; Rom. 5:3-5; Rom 8:16,17; Rom. 8:28-39; Heb. 2:9-11; Heb. 5:8,9; Heb. 11; Heb.12:1-13; I Peter 3:13-17; I Peter 4:12-19. Meaty stuff, and there's lots more!

## **Part VII**

### **The Dividing Line**

“Religion” and even “God” are not where the lines will fall when things get tough. America has become inclusive enough that there is plenty of room for them. Rather, it will be the person and the name of Jesus.

## 26) The Name

Those who declare as truth Jesus' words in John 14:6: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*, will find themselves at odds with the masses and even with many in the church.

Already many American-Christians have abandoned the core truths of John 3 (below) in favor of giving equal place to other world religions. Is it significant that Matthew 7:1: *Do not judge, or you too will be judged*, has replaced John 3:16 as the scripture that Americans know best?

Consider how these words of Jesus in John 3 fit the tenor of world (and even American) religious minds: *16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. - - - 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. - - - 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*

We're speaking of Jesus the central figure of the Bible and the pivotal figure of history; Jesus of Nazareth, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; Jesus, who is eternally God with the Father and the Holy Spirit; Jesus, who came to earth and took on a human body and died on a cross to bear the penalty for our sins, so that we could have fullness of life now and spend eternity in heaven with Him instead of eternity in Hell with Satan; Jesus, who was buried, was raised from the dead by the power of God on the third day, walked among men, ascended to heaven and now sits at the Father's right hand to intercede for us; Jesus, who is coming again to take us home to be with Him forever. Jesus, before Whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. *That Jesus.*

Do you sense how deeply offensive such an exclusive position is to those who embrace the inclusive spirit which has spread across America and around the world? What lies ahead for Christians who humbly but firmly stand on these truths?

**Matthew 10:16-39** is an excellent text for pastors who want to prepare their flock for things to come. Isn't v34 the pivotal truth there?: *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

When we use the term "the name of Jesus," we're speaking of more than the name of one person to distinguish them from another. Instead, we're identifying all that Jesus is and everything that His name implies and covers, as in John 1:12-13: *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Jesus is respected by most faiths (even Islam) as a good man and one who symbolizes peace. Isn't it the irony of ironies that the declaration of "the Name of Jesus" has become a sword which divides!? Consider the major, controversial issues of the day and see how many are rooted in what "the Name" represents.

**A sober reality** is that historically it has been the institutional church that rejected and persecuted Christians who were going deeper with God. Characteristics of institutions are that they offer security and ways of doing things, and they have power to assure their ability to continue doing so. An inherent risk is that this power can easily be used against those who appear to threaten their authority and control by proposing the need for change.

Christians who pursue God with new vigor must communicate humbly and respectfully with their pastor. They must listen carefully to his counsel. They must also be prepared to continue in fellowship with likeminded brothers and sisters without the affirmation of their pastor or others whom they have previously looked to for support. That is a fine line to walk and it must be approached with a Christlike blend of boldness and meekness.

It is a fact of history that the Catholic Church persecuted those who embraced the Protestant Reformation. But then when the Anabaptist Reformation (Radical Reformation) emerged in the 1520's, the Anabaptists were hunted down and killed by the Protestant state churches!

History offers few examples of Godly living that are as authentic as the Anabaptists of the 1500's. Google "Anabaptist Reformation" or "Anabaptist persecution" and see if you're not inspired to deepen your own commitment! They were as close to the Hebrews 11 definition of "faithful" as you can get!

**Acts 4** brings together much of what this manuscript is about. Consider Peter's bold and exclusive message in vv10-12: *It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'* 12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

When Peter's declaration was rejected, he and John were threatened and told to remain silent, to which they replied: *19b Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

But read on. Their boldness was followed by their gathering with other believers, and seeking the heart of God. He answered and led them into a lifestyle that enabled them to move with Him at a new level. There is a kind of balance here which must be kept in mind by those who want to be bold for God!

## 27) The Options

Much of the American-Christian's sense of who we are, and of what "the good life" means, is connected to our being American. As change takes place in the days ahead, some Christians will turn toward God and others will turn away from Him. They don't know Him well enough to love and trust Him in the tough times.

We will be challenged from two directions, i.e. economic opportunity and religious freedom. The diminishment or loss of economic opportunity will throw many American-Christians for a spin because it has been so much at the center of their personal identity and sense of wellbeing.

The diminishment or loss of free speech and religious freedom is already happening and will increase. Even now it is a crime under anti-hate laws in several countries to declare homosexuality to be sin, and we're not far from the same.

**Both darkness and light will increase** in the days ahead, and the light of truth will provoke a violent reaction from the darkness of lies. Consider II Corinthians 2:14-16: *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?* The aroma of God's presence in us will encourage those who seek Him, but it will inflame those who are rejecting Him.

Christians will have several choices as the days grow darker. One option will be to lift our eyes toward God and things eternal; finding our identity, and our sense of purpose and well-being there. We will become much more intimate with Him and things of this earth will mean less and less as their power over us is broken. The ecstasy of this intimacy will trivialize any price we need to pay.

**Another path and one that many Christians will follow**, is to give ourselves to movements which make us feel spiritual without needing to deal with our love for the world. God *is* making Himself known in wonderful ways, and that will increase as the storm grows. I also believe that things "new" which come from personal brokenness before God and intimacy with Him, are more likely to be authentic than those which come in large gatherings with spectacular public displays of power.

Elaine and I received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, with various accompanying evidences, in 1971. It was both a sanctifying and empowering experience. We embrace all of the spiritual gifts and apply them as appropriate, but I am skeptical of the "revivals" that are taking place here and there where spirituality is often measured more by spectacular demonstrations of power than by deep inner change of affections and lifestyle.

You can mark my word on this. True revival will not come through a man or woman. Many thought that God would use several recent revival personalities to bring world revival. Christians will continue to exalt such persons, who will continue to disappoint them.

Revival will come as individuals turn to Jesus in a time of need, and no man or woman will be at the helm. He will not need to share that glory with another and it is only the vanity and shallowness of the church that keeps Christians looking to a person to lead them into revival.

Revival will come from the contrite heart and brokenness which follow the saint's encounter with Jesus in the closet – not the well publicized personalities, platforms and spiritual fireworks which Christians now flock to. It will be Jesus and the grass roots. Wait and see – and in the meantime don't be deceived. Satan has *his* game, too.

Still another predictable option is that as fear increases, **Christians will look to men** instead of to God for their answers and their hope.

We need leaders among us and their role is to help us move toward God. However, many Christians are weak, and thus vulnerable to even well-intentioned leaders who cannot resist the temptation to ascend in power over them. The core motivations of both political and church leaders will be put to the test and many will fail. Its part of the opportunistic nature of the old nature! Didn't Jesus say that false prophets will arise and many will follow them? Consider Matthew 24:10-13: *At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

And then there's **Ezekiel 33:30-32**, a rather fascinating scenario to consider. I believe that with the direction things are taking in the church it could be a very common response. Read it – it's going to happen and we're all vulnerable!

I've observed for years that Christians like to talk about how awful things are, but nothing changes. We somehow think that by talking in concerned tones about the direction of our nation and/or the church, we have declared ourselves "good" and thus relieved ourselves of responsibility to examine our own lives or to pursue God more seriously! Maybe we could call them "the Isaiah 29:13-14 folks."

Finally, there's the even less honorable response that some Christians will choose when the going gets rough. They are **the ones who will betray** family and friends.

## 28) Betrayal

Jesus said that a day would come when even those closest to us could betray us. You can think of “brother” and others here as familial and/or those in the church.

Consider Matthew 10:21-22: *Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

Could such a thing occur among American-Christians in the foreseeable future? Has it already happened to countless followers of Jesus through the centuries and is it happening at various places around the world right now?

I was laying in bed one night some years ago with **a question rolling around in my head**. I was a pastor and was concerned about the approaching day when our American freedoms will be taken away. The question was, "At what point will Christians compromise their faith and their relationship with each other in a time of difficulty?" I felt inclined to go to my study and write. The answer that came to me was simply, "The point of compromise will be the point of affection."

Think of an “affection” as whatever we would wrap our arms around, and cling to, and hold close to us at the expense of something else. If independence; material things; reputation; the church institution; freedom from pain and suffering; position; power; our job or business; or security of some kind, for example, are the object of our greatest affection, we will be tempted to compromise relationships in order to preserve them. It’s that simple.

Persons in places of position in banking, business, and even church administration will acquiesce to demands, rationalizing that by doing so they will be able to continue in that position themselves, or keep that institution in action.

**In America we have come to believe** that pain, want and suffering are to be avoided at almost any cost. So much of the American way of life is geared to protect us from such. Insurances and reliance upon drugs have helped condition us that way.

In the hour of trial many will cave in without realizing they are compromising on spiritual issues. Often they will actually believe that they are doing what is right. By doing so however, they *will* deny Christ as Lord and could betray those of His Body, the Church.

**Are you** and the Christians you are close to, prepared to make the right choices – even at personal cost?

## 29) Trustworthy?

One of the most powerful deterrents to compromise will be deep, personal relationships among Christians. The present spirit of independence and individualism will contribute to compromise because it is so self-centered.

How many Christians do you think have ever asked themselves, “Which of my friends would pay the price for me rather than betray me?” Have *you* asked that? Do you know?

Do you have friends whom you could depend on to remain loyal to you even if it meant suffering or death to them? Who would hide or protect you if those who meant you harm because of your stand for Christ, came after you? And to whom would you express the same loyalty?

I say frankly that many Christians today would fail such a test. Can you recognize meaningful friendships that you know *wouldn't* hold up to that? Can you candidly identify those who warmly greet you on Sunday morning and maybe even hug you and say “God bless you,” but who could quickly find higher loyalties in tough times?

**Trustworthiness is not** based on appearance of spirituality or on ones' testimony. There's a lot of “fluff” out there. Nor is it based on agreement on Christian doctrine or practice. Many who embrace the same theological package as you; and go to the same church; and worship with similar expression; and serve on the same committees – will betray you when push comes to shove. I'm sorry, but it's true.

Both loyalty and betrayal will come from unexpected places. Consider how in the Rwanda genocide of 1994, a Hutu would massacre a Tutsi who had been a lifelong friend, but in another case a Hutu would risk his life by hiding a Tutsi who wasn't even a close friend. There will be persons whose strong, core human decency will empower them to remain loyal longer than some of the super-saints in the church. We don't always know the trigger points in others that will cause them to turn their hearts – or their backs toward us. We will be disappointed but let's not be dismayed. God is still with us.

**We learn to trust or not trust others** on the basis of knowing them. And we know people we spend time with. Christians must begin to quietly but deliberately forge relationships that will sustain a test of loyalty.

One way is to have people over to your home or go out to eat together, and as God leads, attempt to move the conversation along serious lines. Or observe your Sunday School class or a Bible study and ask God to show you someone there who might enter into a more serious, one-on-one discussion. Christians are far too superficial to know each other to any depth. We also learn to know others by playing or working together, but at some point we need to get beyond the superficial.

Here are several practical points as you consider who might (or might not) be a loyal brother or sister. Ask God to help you see the real person inside them. Be assured that there will be some surprises – both ways!

- Look for a shared, life-shaping commitment to Jesus, where your fellowship with each other is rooted in your common fellowship with God, as in I John 1:3.
- Those who have already made sacrificial life-choices based on their walk with Him have demonstrated His place in their life in a way that gives you some clues. The flip side is as true.
- Personal integrity. Who are the people of their word? Who can you depend on in the little things? Who’s “Yes is yes and no, no?” Learn from that.
- Who demonstrates consistency between their life inside the church and in everyday life?
- Who greets you warmly but then talks negatively about you behind your back?

I propose that one of the most trustworthy elements in the church will be those whom we sometimes consider marginal Christians. They hold themselves back from the mainstream church-going crowd and hang around the fringes. And something else - they sport more Harley t-shirts and tattoos than the in-crowd does. The fact is that many of them hold back because they are too “real” to give themselves to the superficiality and hypocrisy of the larger church.

I say confidently that when the going gets tough, the tough will get going. Wait and see – they will be the most trustworthy group among us. In the meantime, they have more depth than we give them credit for and there’s a lot we could learn from them.

**It’s also true** that in tough times we’ll find ourselves joined at the heart to persons from Christian persuasions and practices that we now find it so easy to set aside. Those secondary theological issues; the cultural stuff; the symbols of faithfulness; the religious traditions – all will fall away as our lives merge under our Lord Jesus Christ. The adamant teetotaler may be sheltered by the one who enjoys a glass of wine. The one who still needs his “puff” might protect the one who formerly judged him so harshly. And vice versa.

**I am not insisting that these things will happen** in the very near future. What I am saying is that Jesus said they would take place and the necessary ingredients are now present and growing exponentially – but it will only happen when God says “Go.” In the meantime, are we ready, or willing to get ready?

Let’s not be naïve. These are things to be considered quietly and prayerfully. And maybe it’s something that we should talk about – at the right time and in the right setting.

## Conclusion

American-Christians are facing a dilemma which centers on our core identity and its source. It effects who or what do we look to for our significance – our sense of life and hope?

We must continue to be loyal citizens of the United States of America. But we have also declared ourselves to be citizens in the Kingdom of God. It is the primacy which each has in our heart, mind and soul that is now being brought to the forefront.

We would always have said that we are Christian first and American second, but honestly, haven't our everyday lives demonstrated a greater sense of the latter than the former?

It is possible that as the core values of our nation change we may need to increasingly think of ourselves as Christian-Americans? Of the two, whose life and culture will most shape our own as America continues to change? What changes will need to come in our personal identity and our relationship with God as change continues to come to the core of America?

My belief is that this has happened because we have been too concerned about living the American dream and have not given enough attention to what it means to be citizens of the Kingdom of God. We have allowed Satan to turn God's blessing of opportunity and freedom against its intended purpose. Instead of serving Him it has evolved into something which draws us away from Him.

There is a very real way in which  **blessing follows obedience** . The moral and spiritual laws and principles which our nation was founded upon produce the freedom and opportunity that we have historically known. But their abandonment also bears fruit. God does not particularly need to declare judgment upon us – we have brought it upon ourselves as the natural consequence of our abandoning those moral and spiritual laws!

There is something to be said for the serious warnings of both the Old and New Testaments regarding difficult days for God's people. We want to be careful about saying "this, is that," but at the same time we must take instruction and correction from them. We must also keep in mind our potential to be so in agape-love with the world that we miss the shaking of our day or deny its meaning. We need to remember the words of Jesus in Luke 21:28 (NLB), *So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!*

I believe that **because of His patient mercy** God has held back the flood of troubles that our actions deserve, but that the day is fast approaching when it will be released upon us. This, coupled with the global nature of economic and other issues, creates the setting in which previously unimaginable events can take place. Many will be confused, but the Cosmic Battle, the contest between God and Satan, will become increasingly visible to those who have eyes to see it.

These are exciting days in history! We live in a time of opportunity to be a part of what God is doing in making His light shine brighter as the darkness around us increases. And it will.

**In one hand we hold opportunities** and resources which still exist for us as Americans, and in the other we hold the power to choose what we will do with them. Bringing those two together in humble surrender to God is "opportunity defined," but I fear that many will miss it because both of their hands will grip the good life as we have known it. As they see it slipping from their hands, some will turn toward God and others against Him. That's a choice that Christian-Americans need to start to think about.

If the Church wakes up and gets serious, it could have a positive effect on the future of our nation. However, this is in somewhat the same vein as our motive for giving. We don't give to get, but we cherish the principle that as we give it produces a return to us. Same here. We would not repent in order to turn judgment away from our land. We would repent because we want to become more genuinely the people of God; loving Him and representing Him to the ends of the earth. A product of that might be that our nation would be healed, but if that is our motive for repenting then we'll only change enough to try to get by. It won't be heart repentance.

**If we don't soon wake up** we'll be in very serious trouble, both as Americans and as Christians. As I said in the Introduction: Here's a bottom-line thought that I hope prevails in your mind as you read. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by viewing current events as a wake-up call which moves us toward becoming the people of God in the way He always wanted us to be. If American-Christians were to take these thoughts to heart it would lead to repentance and new life in the church. This new life could extend the time of God's grace upon America; or empower us to stand through difficulties that will come as His grace is lifted because of our sin; or some combination of the two. Either way, we win.

I am personally confident of **the return of Jesus to take us home** to be with Him forever. However, I would like to pose this question. Is it possible that our passionate anticipation of the rapture could dull our sense of the need to prepare for serious troubles? That is, do we think that we can go on being good enough to go to heaven when we die, and if troubles come to our world before then, Jesus will whisk us away so we don't get hurt?

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Page 16

We could see that better if we would admit that “pro-life” and “pro-choice” actually represent the two spiritual kingdoms that compete for the allegiance of men’s hearts in the Cosmic Battle.

Abortion is unspeakably cruel. It not only violates everything Christian, it contradicts the most basic elements of human decency. Americans and even many American-Christians have slid into denial of the inhumanity of the abortion process because we can’t bear to consider how brutal it is against defenseless, innocent babies. This denial further protects the pro-choice movement against honest appraisal, thus enabling their continued contribution to our nation’s downward spiral.

Further, there is a fascinating correlation between spirituality and sexuality. Their shared ability to take us deeply into either light or darkness, ecstasy or agony, is unmatched by any other aspect of humanity. Each has shades of mystery, and characteristics that defy its being easily or fully defined. Either can effectively characterize us and to make us the person we are both inwardly and outwardly. Our expression of sexuality is a significant expression of our spirituality, revealing who we connect with in the Cosmic Battle.

Pure sexual intimacy, i.e. that which is practiced between a husband and wife who love and respect each other, symbolizes the intimate, pure and bonding relationship which God intends between mankind and Himself. Godly sexual intercourse is not just body to body, it is person to person; connecting each with the other at the deepest level of our innermost being.

Is it possible that a culture’s approval of homosexuality similarly symbolizes the depth of intimacy and bonding which it has chosen to enter into with the one who opposes God in the Cosmic Battle?

<sup>2</sup> Page 23

We want to be careful however, about thinking that God needs America to get His work done. Although we have historically been the primary source of missionary effort, it is now true that over two thirds of worldwide Christian evangelistic/missionary work is being conducted by other than North American and European Christians. We continue to play a significant role in training and equipping others but should never presume that God needs to keep us rich and free so that He can reach the ends of the earth.

These words came to me in a quiet time before God on Friday, October 10, 2008, as world financial markets crumpled around us. It came, *before* I read in Yahoo News that leaders of the world's top economies were gathering in Washington that day, of which President Bush said, "Through these efforts, the world is sending an unmistakable signal. We're in this together and we'll come through this together."

## **A Day of Repentance, Reconciliation and Restoration**

So what is the meaning of "A Day?" It is a time of repentance, reconciliation and restoration. Of turning from the vanity which has so captured the American heart and indeed the heart of the world. A day of seeking the very heart of God, in depth, with renewed vigor. In fact, with vigor you have not heretofore known. You had no need of it in your hearts because you felt full and complete, both in things sinful and things not sinful in themselves but which nevertheless filled your hearts in place of God.

### **A Day of Suffering**

You have not known what it means to suffer. You will now know. Some will stand, many will fall. Standing will be based upon receiving the strength of God in place of strength from the things of the world which have so filled your life and even your soul.

There is no other hope. No other way to stand. Many will try but all will fail.

The distraught will cry. All will cry. Some will look up, some will not. Those who do will find strength to persevere. And they will find counsel, and even peace. But their own peace will be threatened by the distraught hearts and minds of those they know and love, but who refuse to look up. They continue to look to the world and the things of the world, and to men in power, to give them the answers of life. The things of the world were *always* empty and hollow and without ability to give peace in a time when their espoused ability was challenged by the events of life. And men in power have so given themselves to greed and self-interest that they are unable to give sound counsel and direction. It is a day of dismay.

### **A Day of Separation**

It is also a day of separation. A day in which men must choose who or Who will be their god or God. It is a choice that will be followed by both price and reward. It will cost something either way but the cost is not equal. Nor is the reward.

Some will follow the voice of "now." Immediacy. Expediency. Relief from the overwhelming, captivating and gnawing fear of the unknown. And from the sense that they are no longer able to control their own destiny. And for a short time they will feel relief.

Others will follow the voice which reigns eternal. The voice imbedded in the scripture: *The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and*

*all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitations, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*  
(Acts 17:24-31, NAS)

### **Looking Up**

The humble, the wise and the few will find strength in the eternal purposes of God. And in God Himself because it is He Who is working in the events of the day to accomplish His eternal purposes. They will need nothing else because He will be their source for every need.

These will not be easy days for any. All will suffer in some ways. The suffering of some will draw them toward God because they have seen the vanity and futility of all else. The suffering of others will draw them away from Him because they are still fixated on the things of life as the answer to the hunger of the human soul. And mind.

True peace will be found by those who repent of finding life in the things of the world and who determine to find it only in following the heart of, and fulfilling the eternal purposes of, God. They will be willing to suffer the loss of all things for His sake. And not only "things," but relationships that have made them feel important, and safe. They will love all, for the sake of Jesus, but will trust none for the answers to the questions of the day. Their answer will come only in the moment of quiet fellowship with God and surrender to His voice. That voice will be heard by all who genuinely seek Him.

Those who know God in this way will be united at a level of fellowship, of true koinonia, that they have never previously known or even imagined. It will be deeply felt but unspoken. It will exist in a way which represents the nature of God, i.e. the Trinity. As men have fellowship with God in the deepest part of their inner being they will have similar fellowship with each other. It will be without plan or intention. It will simply be, because God IS.

All who trust in gold or in precious metals or other things considered precious, will be disappointed. There is nothing secure outside of God. No stockpiles. No hedging against possible eventualities. Those who find their security in God will be truly secure because He is the Rock. The One Who knows all and Who sees all and Who has power over all.

cont'd

**Truths for All Time**

The truths that are spoken for this day are the truths which have stood for all days, but which have been ignored and abandoned by those who call God, “God,” because of the ease of finding the fulfillment and satisfaction of life in the things He created instead of in Him. In doing so they have cheated themselves and others of true “life,” and while many will spend eternity in the presence of the Living God they have missed the depth of fulfillment and satisfaction which only come by finding them in Him.

These are days of shaking, and warning. They are days for repentance, reconciliation and restoration. Days to turn from setting our eyes upon the things of the world. Days to reconcile the passions of our hearts with eternal truth. And days for the Church, i.e. those who together call Him, “Lord,” to be restored to vital fellowship with Him and thus with each other. The Church which is not founded on doctrine, practice or culture but on relationship with the Living God through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Church which defies boundaries of any kind. The Church which is active and alive and dynamic. The Church which is visibly different from institutions which we have known as “the church” because it functions by the will and power of the Living God rather than that of man.

## The Final Word

Isaiah 26:3, 4 - You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. 4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

John 1:12, 13 - Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 16:33 - I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

II Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1 - Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. 17 Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. 18 I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Ephesians 3:14-21 - For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Hebrews 4:14-16 - Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as

we are—yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 10:19-23 - Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 12:1-3 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

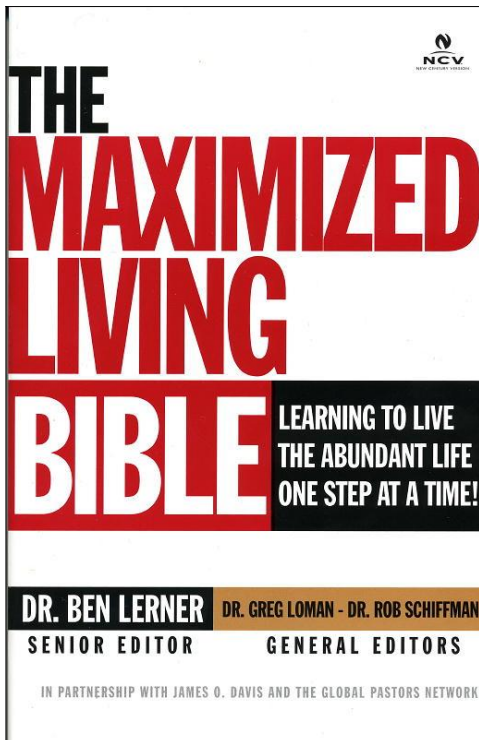
Revelation 21:1-8 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Revelation 22:12, 13 - Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

# Bibles for Ministry!

We have purchased a large quantity of these Bibles for the purpose of making them available to others in smaller quantities, at our cost, for prison ministry, community outreach and similar efforts. Or you can buy them to resell for a profit, and give us just a little margin! The Bible is the most powerful book you can every make available to others!

## Thomas Nelson's NCV, The Maximized Living Bible



- ISBN 0-7180-1823-0
- 1454 Pages
- Soft cover
- Dimensions: 8.8" x 6" x 1.2" thick, 27.8 oz.
- Original cover price: \$19.99
- Sold in cases of 24

### For Distribution:

If purchased for distribution, and not resold for a profit, we'll sell them at our cost of \$1.50 each. That's \$36/case, plus \$20/case shipping via Media Mail to any U.S. zip code, making \$56/case total.

For more information see:

<http://www.flyinghigher.net/ncv.htm>

God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. Heb. 4:12, NCV

Cost is \$56 per case of 24, including shipping and insurance via U.S. Mail, Media Mail to any U.S. zip code.

Please make checks payable to Ken Stoltzfus and mail them to: P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636

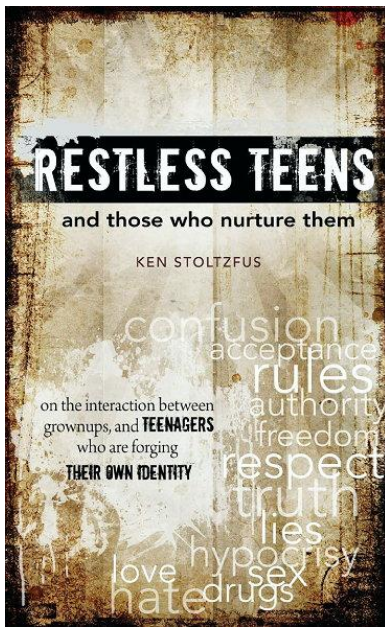
Tel. 330-857-6312    FAX 330-857-6309    [ken@flyinghigher.net](mailto:ken@flyinghigher.net)

# Restless Teens

## and those who nurture them

For parents, grandparents, youth leaders, pastors, educators, those who work in the court system - - and anyone else who wants to better understand and encourage teens!

Excellent for parents of younger children, to help avoid some of the common mistakes!



**Restless Teens** addresses questions like:

- What most fosters respect or disrespect in a child's attitude toward adults?
- How do our rules and the way we enforce them, affect the teen's God-given quest to form their personal identity and values?
- What is the difference between influence and control, and which does God use toward us?
- What is the purpose of authority in the home, church and school?
- How likely is it that adults should look in the mirror when they have "problems" with their teens?
- How normal *are* those teens that seem to always question the way we do things?

From endorsements for *Restless Teens*:

I must say that this is one of the finest books I have ever seen on influencing teenagers as they navigate their way into adulthood. This book is relevant and full of challenging, practical truths that desperately need to be applied. *Pastor Nathan Ward, Wooster Church of the Nazarene, Wooster, OH*

*Restless Teens* will open your heart and mind to see teens in a different light. Ken's lifetime of experience and observation provides rich insight and guidance for those who nurture today's youth. *Noah Martin, D.Min., Christian counselor for at-risk youth and their families, and a high school classmate of the author.*

Ken masterfully describes the oft misunderstood teen from the context of personal experience, and offers a grandfather's perspective for adults in the trenches who find themselves frustrated by what we perceive to be a teens' rebellion. *Paul G. Leaman, Principal, Eastern Mennonite School, Harrisonburg, Va.*

As I read this book I kept thinking to myself "Yes, *this* is how my parent's generation needs to think! *This* will make the difference!" *Nic Miller, a recent teen*

144 Pages - Softcover - Christianity/Teens - Retail: \$8.99

**See excerpts at: [www.GoodBooks4Me.com](http://www.GoodBooks4Me.com)**

Please contact Ken Stoltzfus for wholesale or retail purchases.