

# **Bible Commentary on 2 John**

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# **Bible Commentary on 2 John**

by Jonathan Cooper

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The dates before each chapter reflect the date it was written, and the dates it was edited or expanded.

# Introduction

This is not your typical commentary, so I'd like to give a few words of explanation before you begin. As a child I was taught to read the Word of God on a daily basis. Our goal as a family was to read through the Bible once a year, and that is what we did. When I became an adult I kept reading the Bible from cover to cover.

One day, however, I realized that I wanted something more. Reading the Bible was good, but I wanted to actually *study* it. Could I explain what each verse meant? Did I really understand what each chapter was saying? I decided to start writing daily commentary instead of just reading the Word.

This commentary was put together to help me study the Bible. I have no plans to release it, for there are far better commentaries out there that were written by much wiser men. This document is simply a tool to help me understand what the Word of God has to say.

Jon Cooper  
4/14/2019

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## Introduction to 2 John

Scholars believe that the book of 2 John was written around 90 AD (see Resource 2, "Timeline"). This means John wrote it about 60 years after the resurrection. It was the 25<sup>th</sup> book of the New Testament to come into existence.

4/3/2011, 9/28/2018, 6/30/2019

### II John 1

"1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;" (II John 1)

I suspect that "the elect lady and her children" is a reference to the church he was writing to (which he possibly did not name for security purposes). He also may have been writing to a specific person in the congregation, although the problem with that theory is that 3 John actually *was* written to a specific person, and in 3 John 1:1 the apostle calls that person out by name. No name is given here, which makes me think this letter was written to a persecuted church that may have been in hiding. Even if he did have a certain person in mind, though, the letter is still written to all of the children of God.

"2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever." (II John 1)

This is a very comforting verse! The truth dwells in us and

will always be with us. As Christians we tend to do a lot of striving: striving to stay in the faith, striving to hold on to the truth, and striving to live better. Although there is merit to that (Luke 13:24, Romans 15:20, 1 Corinthians 9:25), what we should also be doing is *resting*: resting in God's faithfulness, resting in His promise to never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), resting in the fact that the Holy Spirit is within us (2 Corinthians 1:22), and resting in the fact that the truth will be with us forever. In other words, we should be trusting in God's care of us. Jesus is the author of our salvation (Hebrews 12:2) and He will make sure that we get safely home. Our salvation is sure because He is sure! Our faith is solid because He is ever faithful. We need to rest in the knowledge that He cannot fail. We might fail (and may fail time and time again), but He will not.

"3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." (II John 1)

If there are three things we desperately need in our life it is grace, mercy, and peace. We need grace so that we can resist temptation and be lights in a dark world. We need the mercy of God so that He will not treat us according to our sins, but instead will forgive our iniquities. We need the peace of God so that we can be longsuffering and endure the constant trials of life. There is only one place where we can get these things, and it isn't through the things of this world! Only God can grant us grace, mercy, and peace. That raises a question: is that where we're going to find these things?

"4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children



walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." (II John 1)

Notice that the apostle did *not* say "I rejoiced greatly that you compromised the truth wherever possible in order to make friends with people who hate the Scriptures. Your pragmatic approach of hiding doctrine is making your congregation bigger, which is all that really matters. Nice job!" That isn't even *remotely* what he said, is it?

The truth is that no apostle ever said anything remotely like that. Instead the message was the same: we must believe everything God has told us (Matthew 4:4), and we must defend the doctrines of the Scriptures and proclaim them. It is vital for us to walk in the truth! If we abandon the truth and walk in darkness then we are on the side of the devil.

John rejoiced greatly that the church was walking in the truth and was not compromising. Can the same thing be said of our church? Do we boldly proclaim *all* of the doctrines of God, or do we hide them because we value unity more than the truth?

"5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. 6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it." (II John 1)

God commands us to love one another. Now, the world has a lot to say about what love looks like. They say that love means being nice to people, and never judging people, and always being supportive no matter how wicked their lifestyle is or what they are trying to accomplish. The world says that love

means smiling in approval at every sin and never trying to rebuke it.

But that's not how God defines love, is it? Look at what this passage says! "This is love, that we walk after His commandments." The Bible literally defines love as *obeying God's commands*. If we are not obeying God's commands then we aren't walking love, are we?

What are God's commands? They are pretty much the opposite of what our culture values. The Lord Jesus never smiled approvingly at sin; instead He rebuked it (John 8:11), and He harshly condemned those who taught others to sin (Matthew 23:25-35). The apostles were not "nice" to false teachers; instead they rebuked them by name *and turned them over to the devil* (1 Timothy 1:20). There is nothing loving about allowing people to continue in sin and go to Hell! Genuine love tries to *stop* people from going to Hell, and guides them to the gospel. Genuine love never approves of sin, which God hates; instead it guides people to the things God loves.

"7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."  
(II John 1)

There is a person who is commonly called the antichrist today, who will one day take over the world during the seven-year tribulation period and force everyone to worship him on pain of death (Revelation 14:9-11). Although John has a lot to say about him in Revelation, that isn't what he is talking about here. In this verse his point is a lot simpler: everyone who denies that Jesus is fully God and fully man is anti-christ, which means he is a deceiver and an enemy of the gospel. If you deny the divinity of Christ, or you deny that He came to this world and took on flesh

and became a man so that He might die in our place for our sins (Hebrews 2:14), then you are on the side of the devil. John is drawing a line between the true gospel and false counterfeits.

"8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." (II John 1)

John isn't talking about losing salvation, but instead losing *rewards*. As you can see, heavenly rewards can be lost! In order to obtain the various crowns that are promised one must earn them because they have certain requirements. God cares a great deal whether we are faithful. He rewards those who are faithful and withholds rewards from those who are not. Our salvation is not in jeopardy, but our rewards are. If we are faithless then we will lose our rewards, and when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ we will walk away empty-handed. (For more information on this topic see Appendix H, "Treasure in Heaven".)

"9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." (II John 1)

Remember, John just said that those who deny the divinity or humanity of Christ were deceivers. There are many other deceivers as well! Some deny that Jesus was never resurrected. Others teach that He never died, or they say that He didn't live a perfect life, or they claim that He wasn't actually born of a virgin. A great many teach that you are saved by your works and good deeds, because the death of Christ is insufficient. All of these claims are false and lead people to Hell!

We need to be very careful about those who come to us, and we must compare their doctrines to what the Scripture teaches. If they bring a false Christ (which means they make false claims about Christ) then they are deceivers and must be rejected.

"10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (II John 1)

In other words, when people are out there spreading a false gospel and guiding people to Hell we should *not* help them. We should not wish them well or aid them. This is why Christians should not be helping Islam! Some churches allow Muslims to hold services in their sanctuary, which is an abomination. God most definitely does *not* want us helping other people spread a false gospel that sends people straight to Hell! It's not "outreach" or being friendly; it is sin! Do we really wish to be a "partaker of his evil deeds"? (For more information on this topic see Appendix D, "The Principle of Separation". You can also see Appendix 6, "Unbiblical Church Practices", subsection "Churches Must Not Form Alliances With The Ungodly".)

"12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full." (II John 1)

Whenever possible, the apostles preferred to address the needs of each church by visiting them. This makes sense, as it's a lot easier to minister to people if you are actually there! The

apostles loved working with churches in person and made it a priority to do that whenever possible.

"13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee.  
Amen." (II John 1)

John is being a bit cryptic here, isn't he? My guess is that he is saying that the church he is writing from sends their greetings to the church he is writing to.

Even in this short letter we find a reference to the doctrine of election, don't we? John is referring to the fact that the reason we are saved is because God chose us, not because we chose God. We are saved because God chose to save us. It was His doing, not ours! (For more information on this topic see Appendix C, "Divine Choice".)

## Appendix C: Divine Choice

It's so easy to breeze right by a Bible verse without stopping to consider its implications. One rather striking example of this can be found in a remark that Jesus made about Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord said something about these two cities that is extremely shocking – and yet for years I read right over the statement without stopping to consider its staggering implications.

In order to give a little context to the passage let's back up a bit. As most people know, Sodom and Gomorrah were two ancient cities that were so wicked that God decided to investigate them *in person*:

**Genesis 18:20:** "And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;  
21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."

Now, there were many times when God sent down judgments upon a person or a nation. In nearly all cases, though, God acted through an intermediary. Throughout the Old Testament God meted out judgment through angels, prophets, storms, plagues, and natural disasters. However, it is *very rare* for God to go down to Earth and do it *Himself*, in person. Aside from the Tower of Babel, the only other example of this that I can think of is the Second Coming, when the Lord will return to put an end to *the entire world itself*. What this means is that this kind of personal visit by God Himself is a Very Serious Matter. It is a sign that someone has crossed the line in a *big* way. If you are in so much trouble that God is coming to *personally* execute judgment against you, then that means your world is about to

end. It is simply not possible to get into more trouble than that.

As an aside, there are some commentators who claim that God didn't actually go Himself; instead He sent angels to investigate. However, that's not what Genesis 18:21 says. As best I can tell, at least one of the three men who visited Abraham on that fateful day was actually God Himself. If you read through Genesis 18 and pay close attention, you will notice that when one of the men speaks the Bible says that it was actually the Lord who was doing the talking. For example:

**Genesis 18:9:** "And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. ...

12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh."

Do you see what happened? In verse 10 the man said "I will certainly return unto thee", and then in verse 14 we are told that it was "the LORD" who said "I will return." The man, then, must be the Lord! It's as simple as that.

But to continue the story: as we know, the Lord told Abraham that He was going to judge Sodom. When Abraham heard this he interceded on the city's behalf, and after a round of negotiations the Lord said that He would not destroy the city if He found 10 righteous people there:

**Genesis 18:32:** "And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

As it turned out, though, Sodom didn't have 10 righteous people, so the Lord destroyed it:

**Genesis 19:24:** "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;  
25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."

When it was all over the cities were utterly destroyed and everyone who lived in them perished. The cities were full of utterly wicked people and the Lord judged them, giving them exactly what they deserved.

This is all well-known and there is nothing new here. However, what *is* startling is what Jesus had to say about it. When Jesus was on Earth He performed a great many notable miracles. Some cities repented when they saw His works, but others did not. The cities that refused to repent, *even after seeing miracles performed by Jesus in person*, were singled out by Him for special condemnation:

**Matthew 11:23:** "And thou, Capernaum, which



art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."

Do you see what this verse says? Jesus said that if the miracles that He performed in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, then the people in Sodom would have repented and the city would not have been destroyed. Stop and think about that for a minute! Do you see how shocking that is? It means that God knew exactly what the people of Sodom needed to see in order to repent, *and yet God did not save them*. God could have raised up a prophet, sent him to Sodom, and used him to do mighty works and save the city, but He didn't. God actually *knew* they would repent if "mighty works" were done in the city, *but yet He didn't send anyone to do those mighty works*. Instead of saving them He wiped them all out. God could have saved them, but instead God chose to kill them.

What makes this even more striking is that there is another very famous case in which an equally wicked city was on the verge of judgment, but instead of destroying them the Lord *did* send someone to save the city. That wicked city was Nineveh. As we all know, the Lord treated Nineveh *very* differently from the way He treated Sodom. Instead of going down to see the wickedness of the city and then destroying it, the Lord sent Jonah to preach a message of repentance:

**Jonah 1:2:** "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me."

One of the things that makes this story so famous is that *Jonah did not want to go*. He was *not* a willing participant in this missionary journey and he did everything possible to avoid going.

His reasoning was very clear:

**Jonah 4:2:** "And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil."

The whole reason Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh was because he knew that if he went and the city repented, the Lord would not destroy them – and Jonah desperately wanted to make sure that God killed everyone who lived in that city and sent them all straight to Hell. But the Lord forced Jonah to go. Let me emphasize that fact: Jonah only went because *the Lord forced him to go*. God actually held Jonah hostage in the belly of a fish until Jonah finally gave in. Jonah was not a willing participant in any of this, but the Lord forced him to go anyway because God was determined to save Nineveh – and Nineveh was indeed saved:

**Jonah 3:5:** "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

As an aside, I have heard people say that God cannot use you unless you are 100% right with God. They claim that if you are backsliding or in sin then God can't do anything with your life; you must be a paragon of holiness before God can use you. I think Jonah conclusively proves that this is not true. After all, Jonah was *not* right with God. Jonah had a deep and abiding hatred toward the people of Nineveh, and he had a heartfelt desire to see them all burn in Hell. Jonah hated them so much that when they repented he got very angry. Yet the Lord *still* used Jonah to save them! The Lord used Jonah to save people *that Jonah hated with all his heart*. This proves that the Lord is the one who works through us. Any fruit that we bear is His doing, not ours. The Ninevites weren't saved because Jonah wanted to see them saved or because Jonah was a righteous man; they were saved because God decided to save them, and He saved them *in spite* of Jonah.

I say all of that to say this: God Himself said that both Sodom and Nineveh were exceedingly wicked cities. Jesus was clear that Sodom would have repented if someone was sent to Sodom to perform great miracles – but no one was sent, so Sodom was destroyed and its inhabitants perished. Abraham desperately wanted to save the city, and if the Lord had commanded him to go he would have gone – but the Lord gave no such command. Yet in the case of Nineveh, the Lord *did* send someone (even though that person did not want to go!) and the city *did* repent and was saved. As you can see, *the Lord did not*

*treat Nineveh the way He treated Sodom.* He saved one city and He destroyed the other.

Now, there is nothing evil about this. Sodom really did deserve to be destroyed, and the Lord was absolutely justified in destroying it. The Lord is under no obligation to save anyone, and no one deserves mercy. Yet it is impossible to escape the fact that God chose to save Nineveh (a city that *Jesus Himself* said would have repented) and He chose to destroy Sodom. In other words, *this is a clear case of God deciding to save one person and destroy someone else.* God chose *not* to save someone who could have been saved. Both cities needed salvation, but God only helped one of them. Nineveh would have been destroyed if God hadn't sent Jonah, but God *did* send Jonah – in fact, God actually forced Jonah to go against his will. That is something He did *not* do with Sodom. There were two cities that could have been saved, but God only chose to save one of them. He let all the inhabitants of the other city go straight to Hell.

The case of Sodom vs Nineveh is a clear case of divine choice. It shows us that God actually does not save everyone. There are some people that God divinely chooses to save, and there are other people that God chooses *not* to save. Divine choice is a real thing. This idea may seem shocking to us, but it shouldn't. The apostle Paul lays out the case for it in unmistakable terms:

**Romans 9:14:** "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

...

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Notice how clearly Paul explains that God never promised to have mercy on everyone. Verse 18 is direct and to the point: God extends mercy to some people so that they *will* be saved, and God hardens others so that they *will not* be saved. You can go back and read those verses if you don't believe me – God is quite up-front about this. God chooses to save some people and He chooses to *not* save others.

Of course, a great many people absolutely hate the idea of divine choice. I have seen some people use this verse to argue against it:

**John 3:16:** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Now, let me say that I completely agree with this verse. It is absolutely true that any and all who believe in Jesus will not perish but will have everlasting life. However, it is *also* clear that the people of Sodom would have repented and believed if the Lord had sent someone to demonstrate His power – but He didn't, even though He *did* send someone in the case of Nineveh. According to Jesus Himself the people of Sodom *would have believed* but God chose not to intervene on their behalf. Instead of sending someone to save them He sent them all to Hell.

Does God treat everyone the same? No – but then, God never promised that He would. God gives some people amazing talents while He gives others a life of disability and pain. Some people are given long lives while others die before they are even born. God moves miraculously to save some people while He hardens others and sends them to Hell. And make no mistake

about it – God *does* harden people's heart to make sure that they *will not* be saved. For example:

**Exodus 4:21:** "And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go."

**Exodus 7:3:** "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt."

Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? The Lord did. He said this not once, *but twice*. The reason Pharaoh did not let the Israelites go is because the Lord hardened his heart – and after the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let Israel go, the Lord then destroyed him for not letting Israel go. Pharaoh's hardening led to the devastation of Egypt, the death of all the firstborn in the country, and the death of Pharaoh himself. And it all happened because *the Lord intervened and made it happen*.

People today don't like to hear this. They prefer a God that treats everyone the same. Many people say that God has given everyone a chance to be saved and it's up to us to take it. If some people aren't saved then it's their own fault because God did all He could to save them.

But that's not what the Bible says! Jesus clearly said that *Sodom would have repented*, but God chose to destroy them instead. Nineveh was on the same path to destruction but God *did* intervene to save them (over the strenuous objections of Jonah). Pharaoh might have let the Israelites go, but God hardened his heart so that he wouldn't. God chose to save some people and chose to *not* save others:

**Romans 9:18:** "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Notice that verse 18 does *not* say "God has mercy on everyone, but some people are rebellious and don't listen." No, what the verse actually says is "God has mercy on some and God hardens others." It is frighteningly clear.

Why would God do such a thing? In order to demonstrate His power:

**Romans 9:22:** "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

What people do not realize is that God is glorified by those who are saved *and* by those who are damned, because both groups allow God to demonstrate His character. Those who are saved glorify God by giving Him an opportunity to demonstrate His mercy and love, while those who are damned demonstrate God's wrath and power – not to mention His justice.

The key to remember is that *everyone* deserves to spend an eternity in Hell. All have sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Hell is the just punishment for our immense crimes against God, and there is *no one* who deserves to be forgiven. No one can stand up and say "God owes me salvation" or "God owes me

mercy." It is a gift – and that means that God has the right to give it to some people and to withhold it from others. As Paul said:

**Ephesians 2:8:** "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:  
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast."

We are saved through faith, and that faith is *not of ourselves*. God gives us the faith we need in order to be saved. However, God does not give that faith to everyone. There is nothing unrighteous about this because no one deserves anything from God, and God has not promised to save everyone. Those who *are* saved are given a tremendous gift, because God has given them something that they did not deserve and could never earn. My salvation did not happen because I decided to accept God; it happened because God chose to bless me with saving faith. If God had decided to harden me (as He did to Pharaoh) then I would have been lost and there would have been nothing I could have done about it. My eternal fate – and the eternal fate of everyone – rests solely in the divine choice of God.

If this seems incredible to you, or if it seems like something God would never do, remember the cases of Sodom and Nineveh. One was saved and the other was lost, because God chose to have mercy on one city but withheld His mercy from the other.



# Appendix D: The Principle Of Separation

These days it is common for Christian groups to join forces with non-Christian organizations in order to accomplish some social goal – be it protesting abortion, or feeding the hungry, or whatever the hot topic of the day might be. Christians will join with Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, Jews, and whoever else they can find in order to accomplish their goals. The supposed justification for this is that while we may have differences we can all agree on this one area, so why not work together?

The answer is simple: it's because the Bible forbids it. Our generation has forgotten (or rejected) the principle of separation, and the consequences have been devastating. The Church desperately needs to relearn that ecumenicism – the idea that we should all get along and work together no matter what we believe – does not come from God. In fact, God is so opposed to it that He promises to curse those who are involved in such things.

I realize that's a strong statement, so let's look at the evidence. In 2 Chronicles 18 we find the story of Jehoshaphat and Ahab. Jehoshaphat was a wise and godly king who the Lord gave great riches and honor. Ahab was an incredibly evil king who was married to the even-more-evil Jezebel. Despite their differences, Jehoshaphat thought it would be a good idea to join with Ahab and attack their common enemy:

**2 Chronicles 18:1:** "Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab.

2 And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for

him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramothgilead.

3 And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramothgilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war."

This is exactly the sort of thing that the modern Church does. Jehoshaphat was good and Ahab was evil; Jehoshaphat worshiped the true God while Ahab worshiped pagan gods. Since they had a common enemy, Jehoshaphat thought it made sense for them to team up and work together. After all, the Syrians were evil and posed a threat to both kings. As the modern Church would say, this is the Lord's battle, and if we can get unbelievers to join us in our fight then so much the better!

Except the battle did not go well. If you read chapter 18 you will see that the prophet Micaiah warned against going to war at all and prophesied that Ahab will be killed. Sure enough, Ahab actually was killed. When Jehoshaphat returned home, the prophet Jehu rebuked the king for joining forces with Ahab:

**2 Chronicles 19:1:** "And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem.

2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

The Lord was *not at all* pleased that Jehoshaphat had joined forces with Ahab. Even though they had a common enemy and a common threat, Jehoshaphat was forbidden from joining

forces with him. The Lord did not see it as attacking a common problem; He saw it as helping the ungodly and aiding those who hate the Lord. What the Lord focused on was the fact that *Jehoshaphat helped Ahab*, a king who hated God. What Jehoshaphat helped him do was beside the point. The Lord was upset that he had helped Ahab *at all*. Because of this, as the prophet Jehu said, "therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

Some may wonder, didn't the Lord command us to pray for our enemies and do good to them that hate us? Yes, He did. But the Lord did *not* command us to *join forces with them and help them accomplish their goals*. That is an entirely different matter. That is what Jehoshaphat did, and the Lord was very upset about it. The fact that the Syrians were evil and were also Jehoshaphat's enemy did not matter to God at all.

Let's look at another case. After Ahab died another king arose named Ahaziah, who was also very evil. Jehoshaphat thought it would be a good idea for the two of them to join forces and send some ships to Ophir to get gold (1 Kings 22:48). Once again we see a godly king teaming up with an evil king in order to accomplish something. Now, there was nothing wrong with going to Ophir for gold; King Solomon sent ships out and acquired great wealth. Jehoshaphat thought that by teaming up together both kings would be enriched.

However, the Lord was not pleased:

**2 Chronicles 20:35:** "And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly:

36 And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongaber.

37 Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying,

Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish."

As you can see, what upset the Lord was not the purpose of the voyage. No, what really upset God was that Jehoshaphat had teamed up with the evil Ahaziah. Because Jehoshaphat joined himself with a pagan, God-hating king, the Lord destroyed the ships they had made. The Lord *hates* it when His people team up with His enemies in order to accomplish something. It doesn't matter if their stated goal is something that is actually good. *He hates it.* In fact, He hates it so much that He promises *wrath* on those who dare to do such things. In the example above, God was so upset at the partnership that He actually destroyed the ships.

This same principle is repeated in the New Testament:

**II Corinthians 6:14:** "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."

People commonly apply this to marriage, but *Paul was*

*not talking about marriage.* Marriage isn't even mentioned anywhere in the chapter! What Paul is saying is that Christians should *not join forces with pagans.* As Paul points out, light has no communion with darkness and righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness. They are *different teams entirely* and they are not to be "yoked together".

How many times did the apostles join forces with pagans in order to accomplish societal goals? *Zero times.* How many times did the Church in the New Testament join with idol-worshippers to stamp out poverty, feed the hungry, or pursue some other goal? *Zero times.* Instead Paul stands up and condemns this practice – just as it was condemned in the Old Testament. God wants His people to be *separate* from the world. He doesn't want them building alliances with them; He wants His followers to "come out from among them, and be ye separate".

This principle of separation is no longer believed by the modern Church. We have rejected the clear teaching of II Corinthians 6:14-17. In fact, we think it's *great* when we can team up with God-hating organizations in order to get things done! We see that as winning. What God has to say about it is entirely forgotten – but God does not mince words about this:

**II John 1:10:** "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:  
11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

How does God say we should treat those who preach a false gospel? Does it say we should join forces with them and try to find areas of commonality so we can build agreements? Nope. What it actually says is that we shouldn't receive them into our home. In fact, we *shouldn't even bid them 'godspeed'.*

Now, when John says "receive him not into your house"

he is not forbidding us from inviting them over so we can share the gospel with them. What he is forbidding is doing anything to help them, either in deed (by giving them a place to stay so they can keep preaching a false gospel) or in word (by bidding them godspeed). John is clear that those who help them, even verbally, become a "partaker of his evil deeds".

Sadly, this is a sin that the modern church *loves* to commit. I saw a case where one church learned that a mosque was undergoing renovations, so they invited the Muslims to *borrow their sanctuary* so they could keep worshiping their false god. That is exactly the sort of thing that John was condemning – but instead of being dismayed, we hold up such terrible sins as examples of "outreach" and "building bridges" and "true love". God, however, calls it *being a partaker of their evil deeds* and hates it with a passion.

Another common thing is to see famous Christians get up and praise Catholics and Mormons for their good works and their love of God. As I have said many times before, Catholics and Mormons preach a false gospel. Praising and encouraging them goes far beyond "bidding them godspeed" and is absolutely condemned by the apostle John, but somehow the Bible's disapproval doesn't stop us from finding people who "bring not this doctrine" of saving grace and then doing all we can to encourage them and make them feel good about themselves.

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate", the Lord says. That is the commandment. God repeats it in Revelation and adds a threat:

**Revelation 18:4:** "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

In this case the "her" is the evil Babylon, the mother of

harlots and abominations. God is commanding His people to come out of that enemy of God and "be not partakers of her sins" – for those who *are* partakers of her sins will also partake of the plagues that God will send. How do we become partakers of her sins? By joining forces with them and helping them in word or deed. We become partakers when we refuse to separate ourselves from them.

The modern Church has decided that it is not interested in separation, and instead it eagerly tries to form alliances with as many god-hating organizations as it can possibly find. The Church has no idea of the great trouble that it is in. God did not hesitate to discipline king Jehoshaphat, and He will not hesitate to discipline us either.

## Appendix H: Treasure in Heaven

It's extremely important to give your life to Jesus. All too often we use that as a rather meaningless phrase, but the truth is that Jesus really *does* want you to give your life to Him. He wants you to give up who you are to become His servant, dedicated solely to doing His will, glorifying Him, and building His kingdom. God wants all of your heart, all of your passion, and all of your energy. He literally wants you to live for Him.

Now we are going to explore one of the facets of what it means to live for Him. Living for Christ means a complete change in the way that we think. It alters our priorities, our desires, our dreams, and our ambitions. It is a complete lifestyle change. It alters who we are and what we do. We can't possibly explore everything that it means in a single sermon, but we can take a look at one piece of it, and the piece that I would like to take a look at is our *stuff*.

In this life people spend a great deal of time getting as much stuff as they possibly can. This is a pretty universal trait for the entire human race. No matter how much stuff we have, people generally want even more. People who have thousands of dollars want millions of dollars; people who have millions want billions; people who have billions want billions more. People spend their entire lives trying to accumulate as much stuff as they possibly can.

Some people have responded to this in the past by saying that Christians should take a vow of poverty. They claim that since Jesus was poor then we ought to be poor as well. They condemn the accumulation of stuff and they condemn the wealthy. Wealth, they say, is bad. Christians just shouldn't live like that.

That all sounds very spiritual, but it's not Biblical. God gave Abraham an incredible amount of wealth – so much so that when Lot was carried away captive by an invading army,



Abraham trained 318 of his servants in order to defeat the army and rescue his nephew. You've got to be pretty well off if you have more than 300 servants! Likewise, God gave David an incredible amount of wealth – so much so that David donated *billions* of dollars worth of material in order to build the Temple. God also gave Solomon a *staggering* amount of wealth – not because Solomon asked for it, but just because God wanted to. God never chastised any of these people for being wealthy. *Having money is not a sin.*

Jesus had a lot to say about the subject of money, but He never condemned wealth. What He actually did say is quite startling. Jesus told us to **lay up our treasures in Heaven:**

**Matthew 6:19-21:** "19 Lay not up for yourself treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:  
20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:  
21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

There's a lot in these verses and I'd like to take some time to delve into them. First of all, notice that Jesus doesn't prohibit the accumulation of treasure. Jesus has no problem with people storing up wealth. He could easily have said "Don't you dare lay up treasure; that is a sin, and it's bad." Instead He said something very different: He wants us to lay up our treasures in Heaven instead of Earth.

Now, this verse tends to get spiritualized quite a bit. People read this and assume that it's talking about spiritual blessings. They interpret these verses to mean something like this: "If I work for God then God will bless me spiritually." That may sound plausible, but it's *not* what the verse means.

Stop and think about it for a moment. Jesus said if we store our treasures on Earth then they are subject to decay and might be stolen; however, if we store them in Heaven then they cannot be stolen and they will last forever. These statements make a lot of sense if we are talking about physical treasure, but they make *no sense at all* if we are talking about spiritual blessings. It is absolutely *impossible* for moths to eat your spiritual blessings or for a thief to steal them. Just take a moment to think through the various spiritual blessings that God has given you. God has promised us eternal security in Christ; can a moth eat that? God has promised to always be with us and to never forsake us; can a burglar steal that promise while we're away on vacation? Of course not! The only things that moths can eat and thieves can steal are *physical goods*. Christ is saying exactly what He seems to be saying: we should relocate our physical goods to Heaven so that they can't be stolen. In other words, God wants us to use Heaven like an *offshore bank account*.

I realize this sounds crazy, but that's because we have a very unbiblical view of Heaven. When many people think of Heaven they picture a big white place with lots of clouds and harps, where people spend eternity strumming their harp and not really doing much else. That picture of Heaven is *not remotely Biblical*. The place that the Bible describes is completely different – and the Bible actually spends a great deal of time describing it. The Bible has far more to say about Heaven than we realize, and it's a real shame that we get most of our ideas about Heaven from Hollywood.

First of all, Heaven is not a vague place with clouds. The Bible tells us that ***Heaven is actually a city***:

**Hebrews 11:16:** "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a

city."

What has God prepared for us? A *city*. Notice that it doesn't say "a cloud"! We are *not* going to spend eternity floating on a cloud somewhere; we're going to spend it living *in a city*. The last two chapters of the Bible spend a lot of time describing this Heavenly city, which the Bible names "the New Jerusalem". This incredibly large city has trees, and streets, and a stream, and walls, and food, and God Himself.

Now, all of us know a great deal about cities; after all, most people have spent their lives living in a city or near one. One of the things we know about cities is that they have places for people to live, and the New Jerusalem is no different. The Bible tells us exactly what we can expect as far as living accommodations go:

**John 14:2:** "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

I realize that a lot of modern Bible translations have rendered this verse as "many rooms", and I think that's deplorable. I don't have time right now to delve into why that's the case, but I can say that Jesus is *not* talking about rooms here. Jesus is not saying "When you get to Heaven I've got a spare closet that you can spend eternity living in." That's ridiculous! The New Jerusalem is full of *homes*. It is an enormous city that covers more than *2 million square miles*. God is not hurting for space, and He does not have to stuff all of us in closets in order to make room for everybody. Do you seriously believe that your home on Earth, regardless of how nice it is, can even remotely compare to what God Himself has spent *two thousand years* preparing for you?

On top of that, I assure you that when you reach your

heavenly home you are not going to find a big building that is completely empty. You are not going to spend eternity wandering around an empty building, wishing you had a chair to sit on. Houses are furnished on Earth and they will be furnished in Heaven. They will have *things* inside them. There is nothing wrong with this; physical goods are not evil. If they were then Jesus would not be urging you to accumulate them in Heaven.

So, then, in Heaven you will have a place to live and your home will have stuff in it. What Jesus is saying in these verses is that you should take the stuff that you have here and relocate it to Heaven so that you will still have it when you reach Heaven. It's true that you cannot take it with you, but you *can* send it up ahead. That is the point of this passage.

Now, I'm not saying that there is some magical way you can mail your baseball card collection to Heaven so that you can have it in the ages to come. You cannot take your favorite shirt and mail it to the New Jerusalem so that you'll have it in the future. There is no way to actually move an item from this world into the next. However, there *are* ways that you can use your Earthly possessions in order to lay up real, actual treasures in your Heavenly home.

Now, there are some people who claim that there's no such thing as treasure in Heaven because in Heaven everyone is equal and everyone has exactly the same thing. They reject the idea that some people in Heaven might have more than other people, or that some people might have a higher status than others. This is a very common belief, but it's not Biblical. In fact, I Corinthians 3 says quite the opposite:

**I Corinthians 3:11-15:** "11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the

day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

This passage is clearly saying that every man's work will be tested, and anything that does not pass the test will be lost. A reward will be given to some people, and it will *not* be given to others. You see, ***God actually cares how we spend our lives***, and He will reward us accordingly. God is not going to say "Bob spent his life faithfully serving me, while Fred spent his entire life lying drunk on the floor; I'm going to give them both the same reward because I don't care what they did with their time." That's insane. As Paul explains, people who wasted their lives will still be saved, but they will suffer loss. They will attain eternal life but they will receive no reward. Those who faithfully served God, though, *will* be rewarded. The idea that "everyone will have the same thing" is just not Biblical.

So just how *do* you lay up treasure in Heaven? One key way is to **give to the poor**:

**Matthew 19:21:** "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

**Luke 12:31:** "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves

bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Jesus is *very* clear about this: if you give to the poor then you *will* have treasure in Heaven. Jesus does not say "you might", but "you *will*". This is a guaranteed, ironclad way of transferring your wealth from this life into the next. If you give to the poor then God will give you "bags which wax not old", a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.

There are countless ways that we can give to the poor in the name of Christ. This church in particular is really great when it comes to giving to the poor; there are all sorts of opportunities all throughout the year. In fact, every time we have communion the offering goes straight to feeding the poor. The Navajo bucket ministry was another opportunity to give to the poor. If you don't want to wait until another opportunity comes up you could always give to Compassion International. They are a highly competent and respected Christian ministry that cares for poor people all over the world. They offer many ways to give – ranging from sponsoring a child to providing a family with clean water. If you want to give to the poor then there are a *lot* of poor people out there, and there are a lot of ways to do it. You really don't have to look very hard.

Now, I'd like to point out once again that Christ describes this Heavenly treasure as something that is *real and tangible*. He talks about bags that do not wear out and goods that are not eaten by moths. If Christ was talking spiritual blessings He could easily have said "Seek the kingdom of God and you will be drawn closer to God, which is your reward.", but that's *not* what He said. Instead He talked as if the treasure was some type of physical good that would ordinarily be subject to the wear and

tear of this life. (There is a reason for this, and I will get to it, but you'll have to wait until the end. Just be patient and bear with me.)

Another key way to amass Heavenly treasure is **to be persecuted for serving God:**

**Matthew 5:11:** "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

**Luke 6:22:** "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake."

23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."

If you are persecuted and suffer for the sake of Christ then you will be rewarded. In fact, your reward in Heaven will be *great*. Keep in mind that *Jesus*, the creator of the Universe, is the one who is saying "Yes, your reward will be truly astonishing." *God* is the one who is saying that your reward will be so amazing and mind-blowing that you should be leaping for joy. You have hit the jackpot; you have it made.

As Americans we're really not very persecuted. Our life is nothing like those who live in nations like Iran, where being a Christian can send you to jail or get you killed. We simply don't face situations like that here. However, that is rapidly changing. The day will come when we will suffer greatly for being faithful to Christ and standing by His Word. When that day comes, Jesus commands us to *leap for joy* because of the great reward that we

will have in Heaven.

Now, a lot of Christians have this idea that rewards are somehow unspiritual or bad. Some people claim that wanting a reward is a sign of immaturity. I'd like to point out that the person who commands us to *want* these rewards and *get excited* over them is actually *Jesus Himself* – and He said this not once, but *twice*. He *wants* us to be excited about what He's going to give us.

This really shouldn't surprise us. After all, how would you feel if you gave a present to someone and found out that they weren't excited about it, didn't particularly want it, and were bored with the whole thing? Isn't it much better when you give a gift that you *know* is wanted and longed for, and will be enjoyed and appreciated? Do you really want to give someone a gift just to hear them say "No thanks; I'm not interested. I'm too spiritual to care about gifts. Just keep it."? Of course not – and God doesn't want that either. God is going to give us something, and He really does *not* want us to spend our lives saying "No thanks; I don't want it.". That attitude does not honor God.

We've talked about amassing Heavenly treasure by giving to the poor, and about amassing it by being persecuted for following Christ. There is another way to amass treasure, and that is to receive the servants of God as who they are, or by helping others in the name of God:

**Matthew 10:40:** "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these



little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

This isn't as difficult as you might think. As the world becomes a darker place, the world will pressure us to distance ourselves from people who are the faithful servants of God. When the prophets were alive they were hated; people despised them, refused to hear what they had to say, and executed them. Those who stood by the prophets and supported them were doing something daring, and God promised to reward them. Likewise, when we stand by the faithful people of God and help them, instead of joining with the world to attack them, then God will reward us.

Also, as you can see, helping others in the name of God will result in a reward. Giving a cup of water in the name of Christ is not as hard as it seems. Compassion International actually has a program where they give water filters to families and villages that provides them with a clean and disease-free source of water – and they do so in the name of Christ, and use it as an opportunity to share the gospel. Their website allows you to sponsor a water filter for a family for \$50. That filter can provide a *lifetime* of clean water for a family that otherwise would not have it.

The reason I mention this isn't to single Compassion out, but to say that the world is full of people who need help, and there is no shortage of opportunities to help them. If we are willing to act then there is a lot that we can do.

Now that we've spent some time discussing *how* you amass rewards, I'd like to talk about an entirely different class of rewards. One of the things the Bible says is that it is possible to earn certain types of crowns. These crowns are not crowns of authority (although we will reign on the Earth) but crowns of

victory. The Bible refers to these as **incorruptible crowns**:

**1 Corinthians 9:24:** "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

As you can see, you have to *earn* these crowns. Some people will get them and some people won't. Paul urges us to run the race faithfully and to discipline ourselves so that when we are judged we will not come away empty-handed. If you want an incorruptible crown then you are going to have to work for it. You see, God puts a difference between Christians who live faithfully for Christ and Christians who don't. Those who serve well will be rewarded, and those who couldn't be bothered will not. The way that we live our lives, and the choices that we make, really does matter.

One of the crowns that we can earn is the **crown of righteousness**:

**2 Timothy 4:7:** "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth is laid up for me a **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

This crown is an easy one to earn: all you have to do is

long for the return of Christ. Those who are looking forward to the Rapture and who eagerly want Jesus to return will be given the crown of righteousness. That's all you have to do.

The sad truth is that if Christ were to return today there would be very few people who would receive this crown. There are many Christians in the world today who do not want Jesus to come back. They are actually terrified that Jesus might come back at any minute and interrupt all the stuff they have going on. They want Jesus to stay away until they've finished their plans and have accomplished everything they want to do. If God were to send us a message saying that He would return at noon tomorrow, a great many Christians would be beside themselves because that would interrupt their plans. The things of the world have so ensnared us that many people see the return of Christ as a serious problem.

This is a truly terrible attitude to have. Imagine a bride telling her groom "No, I really don't want to marry you just yet. I've got a life to live, and things to do, and dreams to accomplish, and you are just a hindrance to all of that. You just need to stay away until I'm done." No groom is going to be happy about hearing that – and Christ does not want to hear it from His Bride either. He wants us to long for His return, to eagerly hope for it, and to wish each day that perhaps today He would finally come for us.

Think of it this way: is your life, and your dreams, and your desires, really more important than the *Rapture*, the *raising of the dead*, and the translation of all saints into *incorruptible immortals*? I mean, *really*? You are more important than all of that? You want Christ to delay coming back and rescuing all the Christians all over the world who are being *persecuted, tortured, and executed* just so you can finish your plans? You are so important that you want all those people to keep on suffering just so you're not inconvenienced? If you seriously believe that then you have issues.

Those who long for the return of Christ will receive the crown of righteousness; those who do not will not receive it.

Another type of crown is the **crown of life**:

**James 1:12:** "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

**Revelation 2:10:** "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

As we can see, the crown of life is given to those who *endure temptation*. Christ wants us to love Him, and the way we show our love for Him is by keeping His commandments (John 14:15). This means that those who keep His commandments prove that they really do love Him. Those who endure temptation and defeat it, choosing to walk in the ways of God instead of the ways of the flesh, will be given the crown of life. In other words, the way that you live your life *really matters*. It is not ok to just keep living in sin. God does put a difference between those who fight and overcome sin, and those who can't be bothered.

Peter speaks of the third type of crown – the **crown of glory**:

**1 Peter 5:1:** "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not

for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

The only people who are eligible to receive this crown are pastors, evangelists, and elders. This crown is given to church leaders who faithfully and selflessly take care of the Church. Those who are good examples, who preach the whole Word, who take care of the flock, and who do so not for wealth and power but out of an earnest desire to help, will receive a crown of glory. On the other hand, those who are faithless, or who set a terrible example, or who preach heresy, or who abuse the flock for their own gain, will lose this crown. Once again we see that faithfulness is rewarded. God really does care about what you're doing.

Some people will receive these crowns, and other people will go away empty-handed. Jesus Himself said that we must be careful because these crowns *can* be lost:

**Revelation 3:11:** "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Now, our *salvation* cannot be lost and *eternal life* cannot be lost, so Christ is not talking about either of those. What *can* be lost are our crowns, because they are rewards for a life well-lived. This also puts crowns in a bit of a different category from other Heavenly treasure. If you give to the poor then God will reward you, and that reward cannot be lost no matter what. Crowns, though, are trickier to earn because they can only be earned by a lifetime of faithful service. They are harder to get, and few people will get them.

The idea of being rewarded for our service makes some

people uncomfortable, but *this is Christ's idea*, not our own. God is *not* doing something wrong by generously rewarding people. We also need to keep in mind what people in Heaven will do with these rewards. On Earth people earn rewards by faithfully serving God. In Heaven people will take their rewards and use them to bring glory and honor to God:

**Revelation 4:9-11:** "9 And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever,  
10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,  
11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

What are these people doing with their crowns? They are casting them before the throne of God and worshiping Him. The Lord had glorified them, and they have used their glory to worship the Father.

Which brings us back to where we started this morning. God wants us to use the possessions that He has given us to honor Him. When we do that – when we give to the poor, help others in the name of Christ, and suffer for His name – then God has promised to reward us. When we get to Heaven and receive the rewards that God chose to give us, we will take them and use them to glorify God – which is how we got them in the first place.

So, spend your life serving God. Lay up rewards in Heaven. Provide for yourself bags that do not wax old, and an incorruptible crown that does not fade away – so that when the day comes, you can honor the Lord and glorify Him with all the things He has given you.

When we glorify God, the Lord will reward us in Heaven. When we receive our reward in Heaven, we will use it to glorify God. You might say that the reason God rewards us is so we can use that reward to glorify Him. Of course, you have to have a reward in order to do that, don't you? After all, you can't cast your crown before the Throne if you don't have a crown in the first place.

## Appendix 6: Unbiblical Church Practices

If you take a look at the many different denominations that exist today, you will find some pretty significant differences when it comes to the doctrines that they teach. However, one thing they all seem to have in common is the way they do church. There seems to be almost universal agreement that there's only one way to have a church service. It's true there are some differences from one church to another, but those differences are largely superficial. This is very unfortunate, because I think the way we've decided to "do church" is very unbiblical. Not only is it unbiblical, but it might be one of the worst possible ways that a church service could be conducted.

What I'd like to do is take a closer look at our church services and the many problems associated with them. I want to explore what the Bible actually has to say about "doing church" – and how completely different its teachings are from the way we do things. There's an enormous gap between the Biblical church and what we have today, and it doesn't seem like very many people have noticed.

Nearly all churches hold their primary (and most important) service on Sunday morning. People from all over the city drive to a building that's universally called "the church". They typically show up a few minutes before the service starts and take their seat. An usher at the door hands them a bulletin, which tells them exactly what's going to happen during the service. The reason the bulletin is so detailed is because the church staff has spent the entire week planning this service. They know exactly what songs are going to be sung, what prayers will be made, what the sermon is going to be about, and how long the service will last (usually within a few minutes).



The service starts out with singing, which is led by the song leader. (In many churches this is a full-time paid position.) At some point the announcements are made and the offering is collected. Someone reads some Scripture, someone leads the congregation in prayer, and then the pastor starts his sermon. He's been working on it all week so he knows exactly what he's going to say. Usually he's prepared a PowerPoint presentation to go along with it. Once his sermon is over it's pretty common to have an "altar call", where people are asked to go to the front of the church and pray what's called "the sinner's prayer". As soon as the service is over the congregation immediately goes home.

There may be some differences from church to church, but that's very close to how all mainline Protestant churches handle their services. It doesn't matter what your denomination is: the service is going to be handled more or less the same way. Some churches may have responsive readings while others don't, but the differences are minor. No one questions the way churches do things. This is the way things have always been done, and it's widely accepted – but I don't think it's right.

If you go to church on Sunday morning, are you going to have any opportunities to meaningfully interact with another human being? Probably not. After all, most people arrive shortly before the service starts and then go home the moment it ends. If you're lucky you might be able to have a short and fairly meaningless conversation with whoever is sitting behind you (probably along the lines of "Hello!"). However, you can go to church every Sunday morning for *years* and never learn anything significant about the people who have been sitting behind you. That's just how it is. If you want to get to know people you'll have to find some other way to do it, outside of the service. (Good luck with that. It won't be easy.)

Once the service starts, you're going to spend the entire time doing exactly what you're told. You will sing whatever songs you're told to sing, and pray whatever you're told to pray. You

will give when it's time to give. When the pastor starts his sermon you will listen to it quietly. The only time the congregation will speak is when the pastor tells them to repeat some phrase he has said, and then they will say exactly what the pastor told them to say. Your job in the service is to be completely passive. There's literally nothing for you to do but sit there until it's time to go home.

Is there something you wanted to sing? Sorry, the songs are all chosen in advance. You can always sing at home, in the shower. Do you have a prayer request? Sorry, there's no time for that in the Sunday morning service (or the Sunday evening service, if your church happens to have one of those). You'll have to pray at home. Are you struggling with something in your life? Sorry, the church service isn't the place to mention that. Do you have a question about the pastor's sermon? Sorry, you can't speak up and ask him – his sermon is timed, and he has to finish at a precise moment so everyone can go home. Did the pastor make a terrible mistake and say the wrong thing? Sorry, you can't correct him. You just have to let it go, even if it means people will be misled and go away believing the wrong thing. Does the pastor's sermon cover material you already know? Sorry about that. There's nothing you can do but sit there and hope that next week he has different material.

If you don't show up at church for a month, is that going to impact the service? Nope. You weren't allowed to contribute anything anyway (except for your money). The people who normally sit behind you might notice that your spot is empty, but your absence isn't going to change the service. If half the church stayed home (which is actually pretty normal), the service would still unfold exactly as planned. The same songs would be sung, the same prayers would be prayed, and the same sermon would be given. This is because the only people who are allowed to participate in the service is the church staff (who are often paid and in full-time positions). They pick all the songs, and all the

prayers, and the sermon topic. The reason you are coming is to watch a performance, not participate.

While you're there you're probably going to spend 30 minutes (or more) listening to a sermon. Was that sermon written with you in mind? Nope. Since the congregation has hundreds or even thousands of people in it, the pastor can't possibly write something that's directed at your needs. Instead he will pick a passage from the Bible and preach on it, and hope that somehow you will find something meaningful in it. Since he's preaching to a lot of people (many of whom may be Biblically illiterate), he can't go very deep. If you've been attending church for a while it's quite likely that you've either heard that message before or you're already familiar with the passage, which means the pastor may have nothing for you at all. Also, since the pastor knows that many of the people in his congregation might not be Christians, he's going to spend time explaining the gospel and asking people to come forward and "get saved". That's why some people try to sneak out at the end of the service – they don't want to hear the same altar call for the thousandth time.

Our church services are very strange. If you want to pray, you can do that – at home. If you want to sing, you can do that – at home. If you want to study the Bible and really dig into a passage, you can do that – at home. If you want to get to know people, you can do that – at home. If you're struggling with something, you can get help – by reaching out to someone *outside* of the service and making an appointment. (Some pastors charge for counseling, so keep that in mind.) If you have questions then you can always go home and try to look up the answers online.

Suppose that people *didn't* go to the church building on Sunday and instead remained at home and watched the service online. Would anything change? Well, from the *pastor's* perspective it would be terrible because his audience was gone.

It's very difficult to preach to an empty room! However, from the *congregation's* perspective it would largely be the same. It's true they would miss out on the 15 seconds they spend saying "Hello" to that person who has set behind them for the past five years, but other than that it's pretty much the same. They would still sing what they're told, pray whatever they're told, and listen to a sermon that wasn't written with them in mind. The congregation has no way of contributing if they show up, and they also have no way of contributing if they stay home.

Suppose that instead of watching a *live* sermon, they listen to a sermon that was recorded 10 years ago by someone a thousand miles away. Would anything change? Nope. They're still listening to a sermon that wasn't written with them in mind. They're still singing what they're told to sing and praying what they're told to pray. They're still not participating in any meaningful way. They're just passive participants, listening to a service that doesn't actually need them at all and which can go on just fine without them.

Many people never question this. After all, church services have always been this way! This is just how things are. However, the truth is that services have *not* always been this way. In fact, the services that we find in the New Testament are *completely different* from the way we do things today. Not only would the apostles not recognize our services, I suspect they would be very unhappy at what we've done. The modern church has picked what might be the worst possible way to "do church". Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about the subject.

## **Church Buildings Are Unbiblical**

Have you ever noticed that when people mention the building in which services are held, they always call it "the

church"? This is universal across all denominations. If you talk to pastors about this they will eventually say that the church is really the people, and the building is just a building. The problem is that no one seems to actually believe that. In *practice* the church really is the building. (I know that's hard to believe, but by the time we reach the end of this discussion I think you'll see what I mean. Actions speak louder than words.)

If a pastor has founded a church in a new city and is meeting in a location that's not a church building, he will earnestly desire a building of his own. He will ask his congregation to make painful financial sacrifices in order to raise the enormous amounts of money that are required to purchase a building. Once he has that building, he will want to renovate it and expand it. There is no point at which the building is considered to be "large enough": it can always be bigger and pack in more people. That's why there are church buildings that can seat thousands upon thousands of people, and which have restaurants and movie theaters and art galleries and gymnasiums. Pastors universally want to have the biggest building they possibly can. That's what they dream about. Preaching to ten thousand people every Sunday morning would be a dream come true.

Is that how things were done in the New Testament? Nope. The Bible never says that Christians should invest millions of dollars in buildings and then hold their church services there. In fact, there are no cases anywhere in the New Testament where anyone even *considered* doing such a thing! Instead churches met in people's homes:

**1 Corinthians 16:19:** "The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."

**Colossians 4:15:** "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house."

**Philemon 1:2:** "And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:"

But that was a foolish way of doing things, right? After all, the early church was poor and didn't have many options. They were also fiercely persecuted, so it would have been impossible for them to buy real-estate and construct a building! They did they best they could under the circumstances, but we live in different times. It is only right for Christians to build religious buildings wherever they can. That's how many people think – but does the Bible actually say that? The truth is, *it doesn't*.

If God wanted Christians to build church buildings He definitely could have told us. After all, in the Old Testament He commanded the Jews to build the temple. We tend to think that since God told the Jews to build the temple in the Old Testament, Christians should build religious buildings as well because God really likes buildings. The problem is there's no Scriptural support for that. God never said "Go into all the world and build million-dollar buildings". Instead the pattern we find in the New Testament is *people meeting in homes*. In fact, that's the *only* pattern we're given!

Church buildings are actually a terrible idea. First of all, church buildings make it impossible for the pastor to do his job. What do I mean by that? Well, I think that pastors would universally agree that they're shepherds, and their job is to take care of their sheep. It's pretty clear that shepherds should model themselves after the Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. He had a lot to say about being a shepherd:

**John 10:11-14:** "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

Jesus contrasted a good shepherd with a hireling. The good shepherd knows all of his sheep, and they know him. He cares for them and watches over them and protects them when they're in danger – even risking his own life when necessary. When one of his sheep gets in trouble, he immediately notices and goes after him:

**Luke 15:4:** "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

Suppose that your church is meeting in someone's house, and is composed of 15 people. Can the shepherd get to know everyone? Of course! In that sort of setting everyone could learn about everyone else, and form a very close bond. Would the shepherd notice if something happened to someone? Absolutely – it would be immediately obvious.

But that's not the way modern churches are, is it? If your

church has hundreds of members then it's possible the pastor may recognize you, but that's probably going to be the extent of your interaction with him. He's not going to know much about you at all, and if you're in trouble he's not going to be aware of it. If your church has thousands or tens of thousands of members then it's quite possible he will never notice you're there at all. In a case like that, if you get in trouble you'll need to fill out a form and file it with the right person and schedule an appointment to meet with a counselor, and possibly pay a counseling fee. That means if you're a lost sheep, you will have to rescue yourself. No one is going to come looking for you because the congregation is very large, and you are too small to notice.

But house churches wouldn't have that problem, would they? Since they're small they can form a community. Since they're small, everyone can get to know everyone else. Since they're small they can become involved in one another's lives. Since they're meeting in a house it's impossible for them to grow very large – there simply isn't enough space. That forces them to remain small, *which is a good thing*.

Here's another way to look at it. The world outside the church understands that small classroom sizes are much better and more desirable than large ones. If you're a student who's trying to learn something, it's much better to be in a classroom with 30 other students than a classroom with 3000 other students. Education can be improved by reducing the ratio of students to teachers and allowing each teacher more time to work with students individually. If you are one student in a classroom with thousands of other students, it's going to be almost impossible to get much of the teacher's time – which means you're largely on your own. Large classroom sizes are very bad for students – and yet *that's precisely how our churches are designed*.

Why are they designed that way? Because the truth is the building is more important than the people. We may never say



that out loud, but that's what our *actions* are saying. After all, we ask people to make great sacrifices in order to raise huge sums of money to pay for the building – and once they enter that building their reward is to be put into an enormous group and then sit passively until the service is over and they can go home. For many congregations the upkeep on the building itself is a crippling expense. People have to pay for the building itself, and pay to maintain the building, and pay to maintain the parking lot. If they're not paying off the mortgage then they're raising money to build a new building (because building projects never end). Millions and millions of dollars are spent building very elaborate and expensive buildings that do a very poor job of serving the people.

In the Sunday morning service that's held in these large and elaborate buildings, which is the only service that most people attend, can people make prayer requests? Nope – you must do that elsewhere. Can they ask questions during the pastor's sermon? Nope – it doesn't work that way. If they want to pray or sing or study or get to know people or build relationships, they have to do it *outside the building*. The building doesn't seem to be there to serve them; instead they are there to serve the building. They would actually be much better off without it! Not only would it save them an enormous expense (which would free up money for things like missions), but it would force them to meet in small groups in people's homes.

No, I'm not suggesting that we take the Sunday morning experience and transplant that into people's homes. The building is only part of the problem. We also need to take a closer look at what we're actually doing in our services, which is what we'll discuss next.

## Modern Church Services Are Unbiblical

The early church did *not* conduct services the way that we do today. They had a very different approach:

**1 Corinthians 14:26-33:** "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

When the early church came together, everyone had a psalm to sing or something they wanted to say. Did Paul rebuke this? Nope. Instead he told them to conduct their services in an orderly manner. If people had something to say then let them say it, and let other people judge what was said. It was actually *good* for everyone to speak, one by one, so that everyone could learn and be comforted.

Did Paul say that all songs should be chosen by the song leader? Nope. In fact, the very position of "song leader" cannot be found in the New Testament! In order to find that position you need to go back to the sacrificial system. In the temple there

were priests who offered sacrifices and song leaders who led people in song – but the church wasn't designed to be like the temple. You won't find any passages in the New Testament where an apostle says "All songs must be chosen by the song leader, and everyone must do what he says. It's foolish and wrong for people to have their own songs."

Did Paul say that only seminary-trained pastors should speak in the service, and everyone else must remain silent? Nope. Instead he encourages *everyone* to speak so that everyone can learn. There's no passage anywhere in the Bible that says "If you aren't a pastor then you have no right to say anything. Let the pastor do all the preaching. Your job is to sit there silently." Paul seemed to think that everyone had something valuable to contribute and should be given an opportunity to say something. His only stipulation was that things should be done decently and in order.

Did Paul say that people should listen quietly to whatever the preacher said and accept it without question, because the pastor has attended seminary and you have no right to judge him? Nope. Instead Paul specifically stated that people *should* judge the message and comment on it. This means if the person who was speaking said something wrong, he could immediately be corrected.

Did Paul say that only one person is allowed to speak in a service? Nope. It may seem that "two or three" is a significant limitation, but you need to remember that New Testament churches met in very small groups in people's homes. Having three people teach in a setting where only 15 people were present is very different from having one person speak with three thousand are present (which is the situation we have today). Paul isn't saying that only the pastor has the right to speak. He's saying that things should be done in an orderly fashion.

We also need to remember that the early church met

*every day:*

**Acts 2:46:** "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,"

**Acts 5:42:** "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

This doesn't mean that every day people drove across town and had a Sunday morning service. Instead people would gather to the home of their friend (who lived nearby). They would sing whatever songs they wanted to sing and pray whatever they wanted to pray. If they had something going on in their life they would talk about it. The group would study the Bible for a while and discuss it, asking whatever questions were necessary. The service had no predetermined length; it would last as long as it needed to. It might be only a few minutes long, or it might last all night and into the next morning:

**Acts 20:7:** "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

No one really cared how long or short the service was. There was no danger of running out of time. The people came together to worship God, and they were going to continue until they were done. They weren't interested in setting aside a fixed block of time on Sunday morning and then sticking to that schedule so they could get back home as soon as possible.

Since this was a small group, it was easy to get together frequently. It's true that perhaps not everyone could gather every day, but they met so frequently that it wasn't a problem. Since the group was small, people could make prayer requests. Since the service wasn't timed, they had all the time they needed to sing and pray and teach and ask questions. The sermons could be as short or long as they needed to be. If multiple people had something to share or teach then they could do it.

This meant the order of the service wasn't determined in advance. Instead it reflected the needs of the people. If someone was struggling with a problem then the group could help them. Also, in a group that small there's no need to keep sermons simple and basic. Since everyone knows everyone else, the pastor can preach sermons that address people's specific needs and situations, instead of preaching a random passage and hoping that somehow works out. In a small group it becomes possible to address specific situations – especially if everyone has the freedom to speak up and contribute.

Since so few people are participating in the service, it makes a big difference if people stop coming for a few weeks because *those people are no longer there to make their contribution*. If half the people are missing the service is going to be *very* different – and not nearly as good.

A pastor of a large church can't possibly get involved in the lives of five thousand people. However, it *is* possible for a small group to gather in someone's home and get to know one another, and become involved in each other's lives. In a setting like that you could see enormous spiritual change because you would finally be able to address the problems that people were actually having. The pastor could focus his preaching on areas where it was actually needed. He wouldn't be preaching at random anymore.

Could you imagine if a pastor preached a sermon that addressed your situation specifically? That would be impossible

in a large church, but not in a small house church. Which do you think would be more helpful to the congregation: random sermons that may have nothing to do with what they're struggling with, or messages that were preached specifically with them in mind that give them the exact answers they're looking for? If the goal of the church is to have big buildings then we should probably keep doing what we're doing. However, if the goal of the church is to help people grow spiritually and make disciples then we need a better system. Do you *really* think you can help people by preaching passages at random, instead of finding out what's actually going on in their life and using the Bible to address that situation? There may be times when it makes sense to preach the same generic message to 5000 people. However, if your goal is truly to help people grow then you need to put all your effort into having your "classroom sizes" be as small as possible so you can work with people individually and address their specific needs. The world outside the church understands this. When is the church going to learn this lesson?

I realize that some churches have what they call "small groups". That is where people meet in small groups (usually in people's homes) in order to do the things that can't be done in the Sunday morning service (like make prayer requests and ask questions). Here's my question: if you already have small groups then *why do you have anything else?* If people are already meeting in small groups in people's homes then you don't need an expensive building, with all the upkeep and maintenance that it requires. People can sing and pray and preach *in the small group*. The only thing the building provides is a chance for thousands of people to sit passively in chairs while someone preaches a generic sermon at them, *and that's precisely what we need to get away from*. I am not at all opposed to small groups (provided they aren't just "the Sunday Morning service performed on a smaller scale in a house"). I simply find it foolish to spend all that time and money on a building that you don't

need *because you already have small groups.*

## **It's A Bad Idea To Pay Pastors**

One of the biggest problems in many churches is that congregations pay their pastors a full-time salary – in spite of the fact it's a huge burden on the church and puts them in a difficult financial position. Now, I realize it's not a sin to give the pastor a salary. After all, the apostle Paul does say this:

**1 Corinthians 9:3-11:** "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?"

That's a very strong statement! Paul makes it very clear

that there's nothing wrong with paying people for the spiritual services they provide. However, did Paul accept a salary from any of the churches that he ministered to? No, he did not. Instead he provided for his own financial needs by being a tentmaker so he wouldn't be a burden to the churches. He knew it would be hard for them to pay a salary and he didn't want to burden them with his expenses. Even though Paul had every right to ask churches to pay him in return for all he did for them, he refused to exercise that right:

**1 Corinthians 9:12:** "If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ."

Paul chose to pay his own way because he didn't want to hinder the gospel. Paul's life would have been a lot easier if he had taken money from the churches, and he had every right to take that money, but he refused to do it. The gospel was too important to him.

There are many churches in this country that are struggling financially. Do you know what their biggest expenses are? The building and the staff. If they didn't have a building (because they met in small groups in people's homes) and they didn't have to pay their staff, they would actually be fine. In fact, without those expenses they would have plenty of money to devote to missions – *which is one of the key tasks of the church*. It's an enormous financial burden for a church to pay multiple pastors, and a youth minister, and a song leader, and a secretary, and someone to clean the building, and someone to mow the lawn. That takes a lot of money that could be spent on *actually spreading the gospel*.

But suppose we did things the way we see in the New



Testament. If people met in small groups in people's homes then there would be no need to pay for a building. We wouldn't need to hire maintenance people or someone to take care of the church grounds. The pastor's job would be *much* easier because the group is small and everyone is contributing and speaking. There wouldn't be a need for him to spend 40 hours working on a sermon, because each time the church meets (which is very often) they would talk about whatever needed to be addressed that day, or the passage of Scripture they were all studying. Sermons wouldn't have to be a predetermined length, and all of the responsibility for teaching wouldn't fall on the pastor. Since everyone was helping one another, all the work wouldn't fall on the pastor – which means he would have time to work and provide for his family. As you can see, everything changes once you get rid of the church building and start meeting in small groups in people's homes. (The next time you're given a copy of your church's budget in a business meeting, look at all the money that's being spent on salaries and the church building. Now imagine if all that money was going to missions instead. Do you see what a huge difference that could make? Shouldn't we be doing everything possible to reduce our expenses so we can maximize our work in the mission field?)

There's another reason why it's not a good idea for churches to pay pastors, and that's because money is very corrupting. Pastors know that their salary depends on keeping their congregations happy. The congregation voted him into his position, and he knows they can vote him out just as easily if he upsets them. That means his job depends on not stirring things up. If he rebukes them or tells them something they don't want to hear, the congregation can easily get rid of him – and that means he won't be able to provide for his family or put food on the table. The moment you start paying your pastor you give him an *enormous* incentive to compromise. There are many pastors who avoid certain passages in the Bible because they know what

would happen to them if they ever preached them. There are many pastors who refuse to teach what the Bible actually says because they know they would be fired if they spoke up. Pastors really do avoid teaching certain truths in order to keep their jobs! That's how it works. (Have you ever noticed that when a pastor is preaching through a book of the Bible, he will skip right over the controversial verses and act like they're not there? That isn't an accident. I realize that your church and your pastor may not do that, but it's *very* common.)

Here's something to think about: what if pastors *weren't* paid? In that case they would be free to preach the truth. If the congregation got angry and voted him out, his livelihood wouldn't be in danger. He could just go find another church. It would be harder to pressure him to compromise because all of that leverage would be gone.

This means paying your church staff actually creates *two* problems: it puts an enormous financial burden on the congregation that in many cases they can't afford, and it puts pressure on the pastor to compromise the truth so he doesn't lose his job. (Are you starting to see the wisdom of meeting in small groups in people's homes? Do you see how many problems that could solve?)

There's actually a third problem as well. Pastors have been taught to look at their job as a career. They go to seminary and learn how to be pastor, and then find a small church somewhere to get started. After they've been there a few years they will find a position at a larger church somewhere else, where they will stay until a better position opens elsewhere. By hopping from church to church they can eventually navigate the system until they land a high-paying position at a really large church. If you play the game long enough you might even be able to get into a leadership position in the denomination itself. Pastors who know how to play their cards right could find themselves living in a large mansion and getting paid a salary

that's many times more than what anyone in their congregation makes. Some pastors even get private jets, which are paid for by people in their congregations who do *not* have private jets (or a mansion).

I realize that pastors don't usually come forward and say these things out loud – but their actions speak volumes. Have you ever noticed that nearly all pastors move to a different church after a few years? Have you ever noticed that pastors usually leave a small church to go to a bigger one, and then move to an even larger one after that? I realize this isn't always the case, but *this is extremely common*. Don't you find it a bit suspicious that somehow it's "God's will" for pastors to leave a small struggling church and move to a bigger church where they will be paid a larger salary – and then a few years later it will be "God's will" for them to leave that church to go to a church that's even bigger, and which pays them even more?

I have to ask: is it *really* God's will for pastors to change churches every few years? I think the answer is very clearly *no*, because that entire concept has no Biblical support at all. Jesus said that being a shepherd means taking care of your sheep, getting to know your sheep, and watching over your sheep. The person who abandons the sheep in order to enrich his own life is called hireling, and Jesus has nothing good to say about hirelings. In His eyes they aren't shepherds at all. A person who would lay down his life for his sheep is *entirely different* from someone who abandons his sheep the moment a better job becomes available at a larger church!

If churches met in small groups in people's homes then this would become a non-issue. If you're meeting with a few friends in your own house then you become focused on *nurturing them*, not trying to use them as a springboard to find a more lucrative job somewhere else. That's especially true if you're not getting paid in the first place! You also won't be tempted to leave for a bigger church because the congregation is

already limited by the capacity of your home.

For that matter, the whole process of acquiring a pastor doesn't make sense in the first place. Wouldn't it be much better to raise up people from within the small group to hold that job? After all, that's exactly how the church obtains deacons and elders! There's no reason for a church to hire someone from the opposite end of the country. It makes far more sense to find someone *within the church* who is qualified and help them grow into the job. If you pay someone to leave their current church and start preaching at your church, do you know what's going to happen? They're eventually going to leave you and go somewhere else. After all, *that's how you got them in the first place!* Besides, it's much easier to have an impact on someone's life if you've been with them for 20 years and they've stood by you the entire time. Why would you value the input of a pastor who's only there because you're paying them, who left other people to be with you, and who will leave you once someone gives them a better offer? How invested do you think someone like that is going to be in your church – or your life? Is that really what you want?

## **Church Membership Is Unbiblical**

Let's suppose that you want to spend time with a group of people who are all Christians. Is that what you'll find when you attend a church service? Nope. Church services are open to everyone. Anyone can walk in – even people who aren't saved and who have never heard the gospel before. In fact, churches actually encourage this! They want as many people as possible to attend their services, and they *especially* want the unsaved to come. That's why they're always encouraging their members to invite people who don't know Jesus.

Pastors know that many of the people they are preaching to might not be saved. That's why services usually end with some sort of "altar call", in which people are asked to come to the front of the church and "give their life to Jesus". Some pastors like to draw this part of the service out as long as possible. They think if they play enough songs and work hard enough, then maybe they can coax someone into coming down and "getting saved". This certainly does have an effect. Since you're telling Christians every single service that they need to come forward and get saved, some Christians start to question their salvation. This results in people who have been saved for years coming forward over and over again. Why? Because that's what their pastor is telling them to do. (Are there ever times when someone who is *not* saved comes forward? It is *extremely* rare.)

Pastors are preaching to a large group of people that they don't really know. Some of them might be saved and others are probably not. A few of them might know the Bible pretty well, but most of them probably don't. Since they are preaching to such a large mixed audience, they have to keep their sermons very simple and basic. After all, they can't assume that their congregation knows anything. They can't go into any depth, and there isn't enough time to get into anything that's complicated or advanced. The best they can do is preach simple sermons on basic topics. Once you've been at church for a few years you will probably have heard everything the pastor has to offer. For the rest of your life, all of his sermons are going to repeat stuff you've heard before. In fact, you may reach a point where if the pastor was sick one day you could get up and say whatever he was going to say, because you've heard it so many times before. You're not going to hear anything new because pastors have to stick to the basics. Going to the Sunday morning service is like attending first grade forever. There are other grades out there, but because of the mixed nature of the congregation you're not going to find them in the service.

Is that how the early church worked? Absolutely not. The New Testament makes it clear that the only people who are allowed to gather with the church were *saved people*. Those who were unsaved were *not allowed to come!* In fact, if a person was living in sin and refused to repent then the Bible says he should be removed from the church entirely and not allowed to attend services anymore, because his sinful behavior might corrupt others:

**1 Corinthians 5:7-13:** "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

When the church gathers together to worship God, no unrepentant people are supposed to be in their midst. The gathering was never supposed to be a mix of Christians, and non-Christians, and people living openly sinful lives, and people who

hated God, and people who wandered into the wrong building. It was supposed to be *all dedicated Christians who were walking in God's ways*. Anyone who wasn't a Christian was excluded from the gathering. Anyone who was openly living in sin and refused to repent had to be excluded until they repented.

Did Paul say that we should be *proud* that we have unrepentant sinners in our midst? Absolutely not. In fact, he actually rebuked the church for allowing that:

**1 Corinthians 5:1:** "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you."

Paul said that anyone within the church who was living a flagrant life of sin should be a cause for *mourning*, and the church should remove this person from their midst. Instead of doing that, though, the Corinthian church actually *boasted* about having a sinful person in their midst! Paul told them that was the wrong thing to do:

**1 Corinthians 5:6-7:** "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. . ."

Paul is pointing out that it's very dangerous to have unrepentant people in their midst, because their wickedness will spread to other people. If one person is allowed to get away with sin, then other people will start thinking that maybe sin isn't so

bad. They will think that there are no consequences for sin, and they will be tempted to start doing the same thing.

Some people might argue that Paul is just saying they should have their membership privileges revoked but still allowed to attend. The problem with that argument is that the early church had no concept of "church membership", the way that churches do today. They viewed all Christians as belonging to one church – the church of Jesus Christ. The only question was whether people should be allowed to gather with them in their homes and attend their services. Paul was clear that these gatherings should *only be for Christians*, and no one else. Not only was it bad for people to attend who were living in sin, it was actually dangerous for the entire church!

This approach has a lot of advantages. It means that the pastor wouldn't need to spend time asking people to come forward and be saved because everyone he is preaching to is already saved. It means that Christians wouldn't be told every single week that they needed to accept Christ, because the pastor who was talking to them would know that they had already done that. If people met in small groups in people's homes, the pastor would be able to craft sermons that specifically addressed the people he was talking to. He would finally be able to preach deep and meaningful sermons because he knew what knowledge everyone had and could build upon that knowledge. The pastor wouldn't have to waste time preaching sermons that people had already heard a dozen times before. If we did things the Biblical way there would finally be a gathering place *specifically for Christians*.

How did the New Testament church reach the lost? They went out into the world and found them. They preached the gospel directly to the lost, and in their gathering places. They *went out to them*. They searched for them and found them instead of sitting back and hoping the lost would wander into their church buildings! That is a much better system for



everyone.

How did Christians in the New Testament become a member of the church? They did it by repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus. That's quite different from the way it's done today! The modern church believes that the church is *the building*, and in order to become a member in good standing with that building you have to go through a rite of passage. That process may involve a class or something else, but you can only become part of the church once you've passed through this rite. However, *there's nothing Biblical about that at all*. The Bible is clear that once you're saved you are part of the church, *period*. It's true that the Bible commands Christians to distance themselves from people who claim to be believers but who are living in open sin, but the Bible *never* calls any building "the church" and it never says anything about what we call "church membership". (There's also the fact that church membership is pretty useless. You can attend services for years without ever being a member. A lack of membership doesn't stop you from attending any classes or services that the church has to offer, and it doesn't stop you from taking communion either. The only thing it actually does is stop you from holding a church office – and, honestly, the only offices that are usually available to people are working in the nursery and being an usher. If you're not interested in doing either of those things then there's no real reason to ever join. It's true that it stops you from voting on things, but we'll get into voting a bit later in this series.)

The very language that we use demonstrates how unbiblical our views of the church really are. If we truly believed that the church was *the people* then we would never call a building "the church", and we would never call the process of giving people voting privileges "church membership".

Is it a good idea for churches to make sure that people who want to start fellowshiping with them really are Christians? Absolutely. But somehow people forget that *there is only one*

*church*, and that is the church that Christ founded by dying for our sins and rising on the third day. We become a member of that church when we repent of our sins and believe on Him.

Modern Christians have vastly overcomplicated "going to church". The truth is that you "go to church" when you meet with other Christians, because *Christians are the church*. From a Biblical standpoint, "going to church" has nothing to do with going to a specific building! This is what Jesus said about it:

**Matthew 18:20:** "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

If two or three people are gathered together in the name of Jesus, then Jesus is with those people. They have "gone to church", even if they didn't drive across town and walk into a building.

Is it important for Christians to gather together in the name of Jesus? Absolutely. In fact, it is commanded:

**Hebrews 10:23-25:** "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Are we supposed to assemble ourselves together in the name of Jesus? Absolutely! Does this verse say that we need a dedicated building in order to do that, and it only counts if we gather into that building? Nope. In fact, buildings aren't even mentioned! What *is* mentioned is the need to exhort one

another. The verse has nothing to say about having a multi-million-dollar facility with a restaurant and a library and a basketball court, but it does say we need to provoke one another to good works.

Here's a question for you: if you attend a Sunday morning service, can you provoke anyone to good works? Nope. Your job in the service is to sit there quietly along with everyone else, and then go home. Can you exhort anyone? Nope. Only the pastor is allowed to speak; everyone else must be silent. It may be true that *technically* a group of Christians have indeed gathered together into the same room, but that group has not been "assembled" in any meaningful way. The New Testament pictures the church as a dynamic body that's composed of many different parts, and each person has something valuable to contribute that the church needs. The modern church, however, is run by the paid staff, who (along with the deacons and elders) do everything while the congregation sits there passively and does nothing. Do you really think that's what the author of Hebrews had in mind when he told us to assemble ourselves together? Do you think he was hoping that we would gather together in a room, sit quietly for 90 minutes, and then go home without interacting with anyone else?

I realize it's possible to form relationships with other people who attend church. *But that must be done outside of the service.* It's possible to ask questions and get help and make prayer requests, *but that must be done outside of the service.* The reason people gather together on Sunday mornings is to attend that service, *but the service provides no opportunities for people to do anything!* If you want to provoke one another to good works and exhort one another, *which are some of the key reasons why we should assemble in the first place,* you have to do that outside of the service. Do you see the problem?

As if that wasn't bad enough, most people *only go to the Sunday morning service.* I realize that once a month the church

might allow people to gather together and share a meal (which is a far cry from the early church, which ate together *daily*). There may also be the occasional church function. But the Sunday morning service is the primary way that the congregation interacts with each other, and it's specifically designed to *keep the congregation from interacting with each other*. (Allowing people sixty seconds during the service to turn to their neighbors and say "Hi" doesn't count as a meaningful interaction.)

## **Voting Is Unbiblical**

It's really amazing how much of a gap there is between the way the Bible says the church should be run, and the way the church is actually run. For example, nearly everything in the modern church is decided by voting. Deacons are voted in. Elders are voted in. Pastors are voted in. Major decisions are voted in. Churches hold business meetings to vote on church expansion, or new church policies, or even solving plumbing problems. The local church is run by the congregation, and they make their will known by the process of voting.

This has some very important consequences. Since churches can vote pastors in, they can also vote them out. This means the pastor knows his job depends on keeping the congregation happy. He knows that if he tells them things they don't want to hear, or he rebukes them for a sin that's common in their midst, they might get angry with him and vote him out. If the pastor wants to keep his job then he'll have to please the congregation. That puts a lot of pressure on him to avoid talking about hard doctrines and unpleasant truths. This is why it's very rare for pastors to call out a church for the sin in their midst that needs to be dealt with, or to address the big issues that have been crippling the church. His job depends on keeping people

happy, so that's what he is going to do. If the church happens to find a pastor that isn't willing to compromise what the Bible teaches, they will usually get rid of him in short order and replace him with someone else. That means churches will usually be run by pastors who aren't going to challenge them, or correct them, or rebuke them.

Is that good for the church? Definitely not. Do you know what would happen if children had the power to veto their parents, and could always get their way and reject all instruction? They would grow up to be uncontrollable, spoiled brats. I think that's exactly why so many churches are spiritually dead. The Bible puts it this way:

**2 Timothy 4:2-3:** "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Paul warned of a time when Christians would hate sound doctrine and would get rid of sound teachers so they could listen to lies that they found more enjoyable than the truth. That's exactly the situation we are in today! Why would people listen to someone who was going to rebuke them for their sin when they could vote him out and replace him with a pastor who would tell them what they wanted to hear? That is exactly what's going to happen if the sheep are given the ability to vote out their shepherd. It's inevitable.

Is that how the Bible says that churches should be organized? Does the Bible say that congregations should vote for their pastors? Actually, no. You won't find that teaching

anywhere in the Bible. In fact, no church anywhere in the New Testament ever made *any* decision by voting! Now, that is *not* because people in ancient times didn't understand the concept of voting. Ancient Greece predated the New Testament by centuries, and it was a democracy. By the time the New Testament was written the concept of voting was hundreds of years old.

Do you know how people in the Bible *did* make decisions? They cast lots (which means, essentially, they flipped a coin). That's how the disciples chose the replacement for the traitor Judas:

**Acts 1:23-26:** "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

If the modern church wanted to choose an apostle today and had two equally qualified candidates to choose from, it would never consider casting lots! Instead they would put it to a vote, and the most popular person would win. In the Bible, though, *no church ever does that*. Why? Because it's a bad idea. It's much wiser to cast lots:

**Proverbs 18:18:** "The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty."

Why does casting lots cause contentions to cease?

Because everyone understands that it's fair. No one can accuse anyone of partiality or underhanded dealing. On top of that, the Bible says that God governs the outcome of casting lots:

**Proverbs 16:33:** "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD."

This doesn't mean that people in ancient times had some special mystical dice that they used to make decisions. The verse is saying that God controls everything – including the outcome of casting lots. When the disciples replaced Judas, they looked for candidates that matched the Biblical qualifications and found two who were equally qualified. Since either of them would work, they prayed that God would show them His will and then cast lots, trusting that the outcome of the lots would be the will of God. Why did they put that much faith in casting lots? Because of Proverbs 16:33. Do you see how different their thinking was from ours?

Notice that they didn't tell everyone to go home and pray, and then waited for someone to step forward and say "God spoke to me and told me that we should do X." After all, how could you ever prove that God really *did* speak to that person? Instead they cast lots, which settled the matter.

The point I'm trying to make is that what the Bible teaches is *completely different* from the way we do things in our churches. There's no Biblical support for church buildings, and no apostle ever suggested we needed them or should have them. There's no Biblical support for a church service that consists of the congregation being told exactly what to sing and what to pray, and then being preached at in silence for 30 minutes before being sent home. We may think that it makes sense for the congregation to sit passively and contribute nothing to the service while the paid staff does everything, but you won't find that model anywhere in the Bible. We may think it's natural to

have 5000 people attend a single church service, which is held by a pastor who doesn't know the people who are attending his own church, but you won't find that in the Bible. We may think it makes sense for people who are in trouble to file a form and make an appointment and then pay for counseling services, but that's not how Jesus said churches should handle their lost sheep. The truth is no New Testament church was ever operated the way that modern churches operate!

Did the early church vote on who should be pastors and elders and deacons? No. Did they have business meetings? No. Instead the Bible established a series of qualifications that must be met in order to take on certain roles within the church. People who didn't meet those qualifications were excluded from the position, and there was no restriction on how many pastors or deacons or elders there could be in a church. (The Bible never says there should be a "head pastor" or a "youth pastor". Those positions have been made up and have no Biblical support.) If for some reason there *was* a limit and you had more qualified people than you had open positions, then you could cast lots. No voting was needed.

What do you do if someone is living in open sin? You remove them from the congregation. What do you do if the pastor is wicked? In that case he is living in open sin, so he would be removed – without any need to vote him out. What do you do if the pastor is preaching heresy and false teaching? That would also be open sin, so he would be removed without any need to vote him out. What do you do if the pastor is not very good? You train him – and there's no reason why you can't have more than one pastor (especially if you aren't paying them a salary). What do you do if the pastor preaches something that's true but the congregation doesn't want to hear it? *You keep him*. If your church is organized along Biblical lines then there isn't a need to vote on anything. (You're not going to be voting on new air conditioners for the building if you don't have a building in the



first place!) If your congregation finds a need to vote on things then there's probably something wrong with the way your local church is organized.

## **Churches Must Not Avoid Politics**

In this country churches are organized as non-profit corporations. (That's right: from a legal standpoint *they are a business.*) The advantage to this is that all contributions made to these churches are tax deductible. The disadvantage is that in order to maintain their non-profit status they have to abide by certain rules, and one of those rules is that they can't be political.

You may not realize this, but before modern times it was very common for churches to preach on political topics. This is because pastors understood that the Bible governs *all* aspects of life, including the government. The Bible really does have something to say about healthcare, and the economy, and laws, and regulations. It really does talk about how society should work, and what laws should exist, and what justice looks like. Pastors used to preach sermons on the government all the time. In fact, during the colonial era they even preached about the constitution that had been proposed by the founding fathers. They wanted to analyze it from a Biblical standpoint and see if it measured up to the standard defined in the Word of God.

Today churches avoid politics altogether. In fact, churches actually take great pride in having nothing to say about politics and not taking any stance on any political issue. However, *this is not an improvement!* Since pastors avoid the subject altogether, congregations often have no idea how to look at the government from a Biblical standpoint. They don't know how to think about a law from a Biblical standpoint. People have been taught that politics has nothing to do with Christianity, so when people think

about political subjects they keep the Bible far away from their thinking. *This is very bad.*

Does God have anything to say about what's right and wrong? Of course. Does God define justice? Yes He does. Does God have anything to say to kings, or nations, or governments? Absolutely! Does the Bible tell us how nations should treat each other? Yes it does. Can the Bible teach us the difference between a just law and an unjust one? Yes, it can. Are pastors going to bring any of this up? Absolutely not.

The truth is that Christianity applies to *all of life*. It's not something that we should just do on Sunday mornings and then put on the shelf for the rest of the week! Christianity should impact how we think about *all of our life* – including the way that the government operates. Pastors should teach people how to have a Biblical worldview, and that worldview should apply to *everything*. Instead of doing that, though, pastors ignore politics and pretend that God has no interest in the subject at all.

One reason they do that is because there are a lot of different views in a given congregation, and if they took a stand on something it might make people angry. (This goes back to the fact that churches are attended by saved people and lost people and people who claim to be saved but who are living in sin. If congregations removed the unrepentant sinners from their midst, which is what the Bible commands, then this wouldn't be a problem. Do you see how many problems we could fix if we did things God's way?) If pastors make their congregations angry then that could cost them their jobs. (Do you see how much trouble is caused by voting?) Since churches pay the pastor's salary that would impact their ability to feed their families. (Do you see how much trouble is caused when pastors depend on churches for money?) The other reason is that if a church starts preaching on politics then it might lose its tax-exempt status, and that could have a big impact on the amount of money it receives (and the money they have to pay in taxes). Churches need a lot

of money in order to pay for their large building and their large staff. (Do you see how much trouble is caused by having church buildings?) In the end churches need money, and to get that money they're willing to make whatever compromises are necessary.

Do you think God is honored when churches refuse to teach what the Bible has to say in order to get more money? I very seriously doubt it. I can't imagine a pastor standing before God and hearing Him say "I'm so glad you sold out the Bible in order to keep your tax-exempt status! That was definitely the right call. It's important to throw out whatever doctrines you need to in order to keep that money flowing." Yet that is *exactly* what churches do. Pastors know there would be serious consequences if they taught the full counsel of God, so they don't teach it. (How do we know that they don't teach it? Well, ask yourself this: how many political sermons have you heard in your life? If you've been attending the typical Protestant church, the answer is *zero*. So clearly they're avoiding the subject.) Churches know they might get in financial trouble if they taught how the Bible applies to politics and the government, so they don't go there. They avoid the subject entirely.

Would this be a problem in a small home church? Nope. That church wouldn't need a budget to operate, so it would be fine. Its pastor would already be working a full-time job to pay his salary, so his livelihood wouldn't be in danger. The money that the church received could go directly to outreach and mission work. It's true that people wouldn't be able to claim their offerings as a tax deduction, but I think God would rather have a faithful church than a rich one. How do we know that? Because that's exactly what Jesus Himself said to the church of Laodicea:

**Revelation 3:17-19:** "Because thou sayest, *I am rich, and increased with goods,* and have need of

nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

That congregation was convinced that God approved of them because they were rich and prosperous. Was God impressed? Absolutely not! God saw that their spiritual condition was appalling and wretched, so He rebuked them and commanded them to repent. They may have had money, but they didn't have the things that really mattered. They weren't faithful in the sight of God. They weren't zealous for the truth or passionate about preaching the full counsel of God. In fact, verse 15 tells us they actually didn't care about the truth at all. They were indifferent – so God told them they made Him want to vomit.

If the government ever comes to a church and says "I will give you money as long as you avoid certain subjects", the answer of the church should *always* be a firm "No". It doesn't matter how small or harmless the compromise may seem. God requires us to preach and teach *everything!* This is how Jesus put it:

**Matthew 4:4:** "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

There are no doctrines we are allowed to disavow in order to win the approval of others. God is never going to tell

you "I'm so glad you sold out the truth in exchange for money. That was the right call." Do you honestly believe that the nation is better off when Christians have no idea how to apply Biblical principles to the operation of the government? That seems pretty unlikely to me!

I'm not saying that churches should endorse political parties or specific candidates. What I *am* saying is that pastors ought to teach people how to think Biblically about *all* of life. Excluding politics from the discussion is very wrong.

## **Families Should Worship Together**

When it comes to church services, the modern church is eager to separate families from their children as much as possible. Churches that have Sunday School have special classes just for children (which are strictly divided by age). At the beginning of the Sunday morning service, children are dismissed to go attend a separate service that doesn't include their parents. Churches often hold events that are specifically targeted at children (once again, divided by age groups). They even have a youth pastor whose entire job is to minister to children.

Is any of this Biblical? Nope. You won't find any youth ministers in the New Testament. You also won't find any churches that sent children to a separate service so they could worship away from their parents. No apostle ever suggested that people should be divided up into groups based on their age, or that it was best for children to not worship alongside their parents. That's not how things were done in the New Testament!

You know what we *do* find? We find that children actually stayed right beside their parents. When Joshua read the Mosaic Law to the nation, the children weren't separated from their parents and sent to children's church:

**Joshua 8:34-35:** "And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them."

How much of the Law did Joshua read to the people – including to the children who were present? Every single word. Did he leave anything out? No. Did he leave the curses out? No. Did he leave the unpleasant parts out? No. Did he send the children off so that the adults could talk? No. The family stayed together.

Are there any passages in the Bible that suggest children would be better off if they were taken away from their parents and taught separately? No. Do you know who God has put in charge of teaching children? Their parents. God wants *their parents* to teach them His Law:

**Deuteronomy 6:6-9:** "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

Who can teach children when they are sitting at the

house, and lying down to sleep, and rising up? The parents. Does God ever suggest that parents should outsource that responsibility to pastors? Absolutely not. Parents need to take responsibility for their children and raise them up in the Lord. Parents should teach their children about God, and children should worship God alongside their parents.

But what about the topics that aren't necessarily appropriate for children? Here's the thing: those topics are almost *never* mentioned in churches. It's extremely rare for anything to come up that might be inappropriate for children – especially since Joshua didn't have any qualms about reading the entire Mosaic Law to little children! If there's a need to talk about something that might not be wise to share with children then it makes sense to remove them for that specific conversation, but that is a very rare case. Children should be with their parents as much as possible.

In a small group setting this makes a lot of sense, because you're talking about a group of maybe 15 people that's meeting in a home. The services that we find in the New Testament are interactive. People talk to one another, they expound on the Word of God, they share a meal, and they contribute to each other's lives. In a service like that children could learn from others and from their parents because the family unit isn't a passive participant anymore! How do you grow wise? By spending time with wise people – *not* by spending time with people who happen to be the same age that you are.

I'm not saying it's bad for children to have friends that are their own age. What I am saying is that it makes no sense to send children away when it's time for the Sunday morning service. You aren't showing up at church in order to be entertained, and you don't need age-appropriate entertainment for your children. There are simply no Biblical grounds for dividing a church service into groups based on age. How can the young possibly learn from the life experiences of the elderly if they're kept in separate

classes?

## God Never Gave Pastors The Power To Marry People

The procedure for getting married in our society is pretty well understood. First you have to go and get a marriage license, and then you have to find someone to perform the marriage. When it comes to performing the marriage ceremony people typically have two options: they can go down to the courthouse and get married by a justice of the peace, or they can find a pastor and have him do the job. This procedure is so commonplace that people don't even think twice about it. If you ask someone "Who married you?" they will typically give you the name of their pastor – because people believe that pastors have the ability to take two people and join them together in marriage.

But do they *really* have that ability? Stop and think about it. What gives pastors the ability to join people in holy matrimony? Who gave them that power? I'm being serious here. Where did this ability come from?

You can check the Bible, but you won't find it there. The Bible gives pastors many responsibilities: they are to preach the gospel, take care of their flocks, baptize people, and so forth, but the Bible *never* gives them the power to marry people. It's never even *mentioned!* Jesus Christ charged the church with going into all the world, making disciples, and baptizing people, but He *never* mentioned the idea that His church should be marrying people. He didn't even hint at it.

The apostles wrote a lot of letters to various churches and told them how to follow the Lord, but they never mentioned the idea that churches should be involved with marrying people. They talked about feeding the poor, healing the sick, making



converts, and even church discipline, but they never mentioned churches holding marriage ceremonies – *not a single time*.

In fact, no church in the entire Bible ever performed a marriage! No disciple, apostle, or deacon ever performed a wedding in the Bible. There are no cases where a pastor took two people and married them. *It never happened*.

What I'm trying to say is this: the idea that pastors have the ability to unite two people in marriage *doesn't come from the Bible*. There's absolutely nothing in the Bible that says pastors can do that, and there's nothing that says churches ought to be involved in performing marriages. *It's not there*. I understand that churches have decided to take that role upon themselves, but God didn't give them that responsibility.

That means pastors *do not* have the power to unite people in marriage. Pastors have no more power to marry people than insurance agents or electricians. I understand that people believe they need to find pastor in order to get married, but there's no Biblical basis for that. It may be traditional, but it's man's tradition – not God's.

So who *does* have the power to marry people? Well, according to Jesus Christ, only one person can do that:

**Matthew 19:4-6:** "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore **God hath joined together**, let not man put asunder."

Who has the power to take two people and joins them together in marriage? *God does*. Only the Lord has that power!

No mortal being can unite people in marriage because God is the one who does the joining. How does it work? Well, it's pretty simple. Jesus said that a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife, and God unites them into one. That's literally what the verse says. At that point they have been joined together. They are no longer two people; instead they are one flesh.

Here's what that means in practical terms. In the marriage ceremony, the marriage license itself means nothing. Regardless of whether or not it's required from a legal standpoint (which is a complex topic far beyond the scope of this discussion), that piece of paper carries no weight with God. Having a marriage license is *not* what makes you married, and *not* having one doesn't mean you *aren't* married. After all, Adam and Eve didn't have a marriage license but the Bible tells us they were husband and wife. There are many societies that never had marriage licenses or pastors to marry people, but that doesn't mean those societies didn't have marriage. To God a marriage license is just a meaningless piece of paper. It carries no weight with Him and has no authority.

Likewise, at the end of the ceremony, when the pastor says "I now pronounce you man and wife", his pronouncement means nothing. Saying those words does *not* make the couple married, and *not* saying those words doesn't leave them unmarried. What the pastor says is *utterly irrelevant!* The truth is *he should not be involved in this anyway.* God never told him to marry people, nor did the Lord give him permission to do that!

What unites people in marriage is when, as Jesus said in Matthew 19, the man takes the woman to be his wife, and the wife takes the man to be her husband, and the two make a lifelong covenant together in the sight of God. When the couple exchanges their vows and commits to being husband and wife, at that point they're married because *God* joins them together. You don't need a pastor to get married, and you don't need official recognition from the government. Marriages that don't involve

pastors, churches, or governments are not somehow "fake". God never says you need a pastor or a license in order to have a binding marriage. The traditions of men aren't the same thing as the commandments of God! We should be looking to *the Bible* to see how marriage works.

Does the marriage become official when it's consummated? Nope. That's *not* what makes two people a married couple! We know this because Adam and Eve were referred to as husband and wife long before they consummated their union. Take a look for yourself. This is Genesis 2:25:

**Genesis 2:25:** "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

Eve is referred to as Adam's wife *immediately*, as soon as she was created and given to Adam. However, their relationship wasn't consummated until much later – after they sinned and were kicked out of the garden of Eden:

**Genesis 4:1:** "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord."

If that's not enough evidence for you, here's something else to consider. God has always been very clear that sex is only permissible *within* marriage. Sex within marriage is good, but sex outside of marriage is a serious sin. This means you have to *already be married* before you can have sex. Therefore the marriage must take place *first* – which means that the act of the physical union *cannot* be part of the marriage process!

Adam and Eve are a great example of how marriage works. God brought Eve to Adam, Adam accepted her as his wife, and they became a married couple. This is despite the fact there was no marriage license, and there was no pastor to pronounce

them married. (I would like to add that witnesses are a very good idea because they will provide evidence that the marriage happened, and will hold the couple to the fact that they truly are married). All it took to marry them was their covenant to each other, which was made in the sight of God. That was enough.

The reason this matters is because we've come to believe that people are united in marriage *by other people*, instead of by God. This leads to the idea that since the marriage was *created* by other people, it can also be dissolved by other people. Since the government grants the marriage, the government can grant the divorce.

But as we've seen, the government has absolutely *nothing to do* with uniting people in marriage! Likewise, pastors are *not* part of the process (no matter what they claim). God is the one who unites people in marriage, which means only God can dissolve the marriage. You can go down to the courthouse and get a divorce, but all the government can give you is a piece of paper that carries no weight in the sight of God. The courthouse isn't the one who married you in the first place; God was the one who did that. This means *God has to grant your divorce*. If He doesn't then *you don't have one*; in His sight you are still married to your original spouse.

Divorce is a very complex subject, and I don't have the time to cover it in detail here. There are definitely valid reasons to get a divorce, and in some cases it is absolutely the right thing to do and God definitely recognizes the divorce. The point I want to make is that God is the one who united you in marriage in the first place (not your pastor or the government), and only God can separate you. If you divorce your spouse for an unbiblical reason (which is too complicated a subject to get into here), then God doesn't recognize your divorce *and still considers you to be married to your original spouse*. Just because you consider yourself to be divorced does *not* necessarily mean that God agrees with you. If you didn't get divorced for a Biblical reason

(for example, if you left your faithful wife and children in order to move in with another, younger woman who you thought was hotter) then God considers you to be having an affair and living in sin with someone you are *not* married to. That may seem like a technical detail, but we must remember that when it comes time for us to die we will stand before God and be held accountable for the things we have done. Our actions really do have consequences.

## **Altar Calls Are Unbiblical**

Are altar calls Biblical? Now, I realize this might seem like a strange question to ask. After all, altar calls have become a staple of the modern church, to the point where it's hard to imagine a Sunday morning service that *doesn't* have an altar call. Who could possibly object to ending a sermon with an invitation to come forward and be saved? Isn't that just the natural thing to do?

Altar calls have become a tradition – in fact, they have almost become a sacrament in our churches. Because of this we don't stop to think about what we're actually doing. We simply accept them and assume that altar calls must be a good idea – but I think it's time we took a Biblical look at what we're doing. We should always be willing to compare every aspect of our churches to what's revealed in the Word of God. There should be nothing that's "too important" to examine from a Biblical perspective. If altar calls are a solid Biblical practice then it should be a simple matter to demonstrate that from the Bible, right? But if the Bible *doesn't* support this practice then that should tell us something.

The first point I'd like to make is that there are no altar calls anywhere in the Bible. Altar calls are completely unknown in

the Old Testament. In the New Testament no church is ever said to have used one, and they aren't mentioned in any of the letters to the churches. The disciples never used an altar call in any of their sermons, and even Jesus Himself never used altar calls.

Some people try very hard to find an altar call in the Bible, but it can't be done because *there aren't any*. People are so desperate to find an example of this practice that they claim Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham was an altar call:

**Genesis 14:18:** "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all."

Just take a look at that passage for yourself! Does Melchizedek ask his audience to come to the front of the church and pray the sinner's prayer so they can be saved from their sins? Absolutely not. This isn't even *remotely* an altar call! No one is urging sinners to repent of their sins and put their faith and trust in Christ – and yet people still claim that this is Biblical proof that altar calls are Scriptural. A simple reading of the passage demonstrates that this simply isn't true.

There are no altar calls anywhere in the Bible! It's not a Biblical practice, and there's no Scriptural support for that idea. Now, that doesn't mean that no one in the Bible preached the gospel, because they most certainly did. Many people preached repentance and urged sinners to turn away from their sins:

**Matthew 3:1-2:** "In those days came John the

Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,  
And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of  
heaven is at hand."

**Matthew 4:17**: "From that time Jesus began to  
preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of  
heaven is at hand."

**Acts 2:38**: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent,  
and be baptized every one of you in the name of  
Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye  
shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

There are many more examples that I could give, but I think you get the point. There's no shortage of preaching in the Bible! What we *don't* find are altar calls. Even when Jesus ministered to thousands of people for several days in a row, He never wrapped up by urging people to come to the front of the group to be saved. That simply never happened.

In our days that would be unthinkable, wouldn't it? If a modern church had a group of thousands of people, they would conclude the service by playing some sort of emotional hymn. The pastor would ask everyone to close their eyes, and urge the people to pray a certain prayer. The pastor would then say that if they prayed that prayer then they're saved. (Instead of praying that prayer in their seats while no one is looking, some pastors invite people to come to the front of the church to pray that prayer.) This practice is so common that it doesn't usually cross our minds that no one in the Bible ever did anything like this.

But the truth is the altar call is a modern phenomenon. It's entirely absent from the Bible, and the early church didn't practice it. The altar call was popularized by Charles Finney, who lived from 1792 to 1875. There were a few isolated cases where altar calls were used before then in some special circumstances,

but Finney is the person who popularized it. That means *altar calls were unknown to the church before the 19<sup>th</sup> century*. They are something new! I'd also like to point out that while Finney was a well-known evangelist, he was far from orthodox. Finney rejected the doctrine of original sin and he didn't believe in the imputed righteousness of Christ (which is the doctrine that when we're saved God gives us the perfect righteousness of Christ, and that's why we are justified in His sight). He also rejected the idea of Biblical regeneration – that people are made new creatures in Christ after they're saved.

Finney believed that in order to save people, all you had to do was put the right kind of emotional pressure on them and use the right kind of tricks, and you could drive them to the altar and get them to say that magical prayer. He also believed in the "prayer of faith", which to him meant that God was required to give you anything you prayed for. If you prayed that 100 souls would be saved by your preaching, then God was required to save 100 souls no matter what. (Needless to say, there are very serious theological problems with that idea.)

This was the mindset of the person who created the altar call, and this was the theology behind it. People today have accepted Finney's ideas regarding what it takes to get people saved – and that's unfortunate, because what the Bible teaches about salvation is radically different. The modern approach to salvation is extremely shallow and produces many false converts. The church isn't doing a very good job of explaining to people what salvation actually requires.

For example, take this account:

I recall a conversation in America in which a pastor's wife narrated to me her experience as a counselor. In counseling someone who came forward [to the altar] she discovered that this enquirer had no concept of repentance or faith.



She endeavored therefore to explain the gospel in a simple manner. The leader of the meeting in the meantime began to be impatient and after about ten minutes could stand it no longer. Sweeping the woman counselor aside, he took over as follows:

"You don't want to go to hell, do you?"

"No!"

"You want to go to heaven, don't you?"

"Yes, I do!"

"You believe that Christ died for sinners, don't you?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Then let's give thanks that he died for you and has given you salvation."

Then the leader prayed as follows: "Lord, I thank you for giving this soul eternal life. Thank you, Lord, Amen."

Then, turning to the person in question, he said, "Now you have eternal life and you can praise the Lord! Go and tell your friends that you have been saved!"

*(The Great Invitation, Hulse, p109)*

Was that person actually saved? I very seriously doubt it. He had no idea what faith was and he had no concept of repentance. On top of that, the prayer itself was prayed by *the leader*, not by the individual! The person never repented of his sins or gave his life to Jesus. I'd like to point out that even *demons* believe that Christ died for sinners, and demons would much rather go to Heaven than be cast into Hell! Demons, though, *are not saved*.

You see, being saved isn't just a matter of believing that Christ died for sinners. You also have to *repent*. You must go to Jesus and ask Him to forgive your sins. You must submit yourself

to Christ, which means turning away from your sins and walking in God's ways. Salvation is far more than just a mental assertion of "Yes, Jesus died for sins"! In order to be saved you must *surrender to God*. You must stop your rebellion against God and give Him complete control over your life, your will, your thoughts, your possessions, and your actions.

You also need to understand who Christ is and what He did. For example:

**Romans 10:9:** "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Notice that belief in the resurrection is part of the requirements for salvation! The verse also says that you *must* make Jesus your Lord. You *cannot* be saved by saying "Yes, Lord, I believe that you died for sinners and I want to go to Heaven, but I'm not going to obey you and I don't want you to tell me what to do. Just mind your own business and do whatever I tell you, and we'll get along fine." That is *not* salvation!

During altar calls churches tell people that if they come forward and pray a prayer, they will be saved – but that is not a true statement. *It's not the prayer that saves you!* The prayer of salvation is not a magical spell that saves people by the mere act of repeating the words. It takes more than that! Does the sinner actually understand the gospel? Are they repenting of their sins? Do they actually believe in the person and work of Christ? Are they abandoning their rebellion against God and submitting themselves to His authority? The answer to these questions is *extremely important*. The only thing that can save people is *faith in Christ*. If that is absent then the prayer won't do any good. We are saved by *faith*:

**Ephesians 2:8-9:** "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Notice that this passage *doesn't* say "You are saved by praying the sinner's prayer, regardless of what you believe or whether you've actually repented!" *But that is precisely how people treat the sinner's prayer.*

The great danger of altar calls is that they are extremely shallow. They don't get into any of these core issues about salvation. Instead they teach people that if they just say certain magical words then they can escape Hell. So what do people do? They come to the front of the church, they recite that prayer, and they go away believing they're saved. Doesn't that seem like a dangerous thing to be doing?

The church then makes things even worse by pronouncing that person to be saved right there on the spot. That is a terrible thing to do! How can you possibly know in that moment if that person was actually saved? Nowhere does the Bible say "If you go to the front of the church, recite a prayer, and feel good about yourself afterward, you are saved" – but that's how *countless* people verify their salvation. The Biblical way of making sure that you're saved is to examine your life for the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The book of 1 John has a whole list of tests that you can use to examine your life for evidence that you really have changed and you truly have become a new person. Do you love other Christians? Do you obey God? Have you confessed your sins? Are you growing in holiness? Have you abandoned your old wicked ways? Are you remaining in the faith?

The only way to tell if a person has been saved is to wait and see, and evaluate their lives against the objective criteria that the Bible has given us. The proof of their salvation can be

found in the life that they lead. As Jesus said, a good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit. Genuine conversions always result in a changed life, because we become a new creature in Christ:

**2 Corinthians 5:17:** "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

If there is no change in that person's life and they continue living sin and depravity then they aren't a Christian. The prayer that they prayed was a waste of time, and responding to the altar call did nothing. Their conversion was phony. But you know something? *That's not something you can determine during the altar call!* Churches have absolutely no business pronouncing anyone saved on the spot.

If the prayer "didn't work", the problem isn't with Christ. Jesus is clear that He will reject no one:

**John 6:37:** "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

The problem is with what churches are doing. It's true that if you put a lot of emotional pressure on people and use the right manipulative tactics, you might be able to get people to come to the front of the church and recite a prayer that you've told them to pray. *But that's very different from getting saved!* Reciting that prayer doesn't mean that the person understood or believed the gospel. It doesn't mean have any idea what Christ actually did for them on the cross. It doesn't mean they're sorry for their sins or are willing to turn away from them. It *especially* doesn't mean that the person is laying down their life and

pledging to submit themselves to Christ.

It's that last point which is especially relevant in our modern age. Churches are filled with people who believe that Christ died for sinners, but who have absolutely no intention of obeying God. These people love their sins and don't have the slightest intention of turning away from them. They believe that they can continue to live a life of open sin, and God will have to take whatever He can get. The idea that you must repent of your sins and live a holy life is completely foreign to them. They would never agree to such a thing because they love their sins too much.

These people *are not saved*. The apostle John makes this point very clear:

**I John 2:3-5:** "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."

The modern church may call these people "carnal Christians" and say that they're just not very spiritual, but the Bible calls them what they are: *lost people*. In order to be saved you must accept Jesus as your Savior *and* your Lord. If you reject Him as Lord and insist that *you* will control your life, then you aren't saved at all.

But altar calls gloss over all these critically important issues. They don't give people a deep understanding of the gospel; instead they say "Pray this prayer and you'll go to Heaven". They don't test the person to see if he actually understands what he's doing or believes in the gospel; instead they use high-pressure tactics to get people to say a set of

magical words. On top of all that, altar calls assure the person that they're saved right then and there – instead of applying the Biblical tests that separate true conversions from false ones. As a result, our churches are filled with people who may not understand the gospel at all, and who may not have actually repented, but who are nonetheless convinced that they're saved because they once went to the front and recited a prayer. That is a very bad situation!

Here's something to think about: of all those people who come to the altar to "get saved", how many of them show any fruits of repentance?

**Matthew 3:7-8:** "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:"

When ten thousand people respond in one of the great evangelistic crusades, do we see the lives of those people transformed? How many of those people lead holy lives and display the fruits of the Spirit? You know the answer as well as I do: most of those people are never seen again. They go right back to their sinful lives.

There are some people in churches who come to the altar to "get saved" over, and over, and over again. The reason they do this is because they don't understand the gospel and they have no idea how to tell if they're actually saved or not. They think that being saved is some kind of warm feeling, and since they don't have that feeling anymore they must not be saved. So they go to the front of the church to try to get that feeling again, and then announce to the world that this time they've *really* been saved. That entire line of thinking is completely unbiblical, but

that's the sort of mindset the church has been encouraging. The church has exchanged the Biblical understanding of the gospel for a shallow one that's designed to drive as many people as possible to the front of the church.

It may seem completely harmless to urge people to come to the front of the church to be saved – but is it? The church has taught generations of people that coming to the front of the church and reciting a prayer is the same thing as getting saved. That is completely different from what the Bible has to say about the matter! In fact, I'm very concerned that we're actually inoculating people from the gospel. After all, once a person has gone to the front of the church and recited that prayer, they believe they're saved *because that's what pastors tell them*. Even if they're leading an incredibly wicked life that's utterly devoid of faith or godliness, it's impossible to tell that person "You need to repent and believe". Since they believe they're already saved, they won't listen to anything you have to say. They have been taught a false standard of faith, and that blocks the Biblical standard from ever reaching them.

Now, if a person is feeling conviction for their sins and wants to talk to the pastor about it, I think that's a good thing. A thorough conversation could do that person a lot of good and lead them to Christ – but that's not what altar calls are. I fear that our approach to salvation has *not* been saving people at all, but instead has been immunizing them against the gospel and setting them on the road to Hell. Are there people who have been saved through altar calls? Of course – but the number of people who respond and then are never seen again is far, *far* greater. Should we really be using a method that rarely works, that produces many false converts, and which has no Biblical support whatsoever? I don't think so.

You might wonder: if altar calls are not Biblical then what should churches be doing? It's an easy question to answer. We should preach the gospel:

**I Corinthians 1:18-24:** "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

Notice that Paul didn't say "If you want to get people saved, play a soft hymn and urge them to come to the front of the church to recite the following prayer. If people don't want to come forward then plant a few people in the audience and have them come to the front, to make it look like people are responding and put more emotional pressure on the reluctant ones. Tell people that all they have to do to get saved is recite a certain phrase. Avoid talking about the cost of following Christ, and make no mention of repentance or a changed life. Keep it simple: people just need to come to the front of the church and pray a prayer, and then they're done." Even though churches follow those instructions as if they were a sacrament from God, you will not find them *anywhere* in the Bible. Instead Paul was simple and to the point: *preach the cross*. Preach the full gospel of God, because *that's* the mechanism God will use to save



people.

I find it fascinating that Christ routinely offended those who came to Him. For example, after attracting a very large crowd by miraculously feeding thousands of people with a very small meal, Jesus said this:

**John 6:51-53:** "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

After Jesus preached that message, many of those who had been following Him left:

**John 6:64-66:** "But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

If the modern church had been in that situation it would have reacted very differently. First of all, the church would have had an altar call to bring as many people to the front as possible. They would have told the crowd that they could avoid Hell simply by reciting a prayer. They definitely would have avoided discussing any doctrines that might offend people! Once they

prayed that prayer and started attending church, they would preach messages that the new people would accept. After all, if you preach hard truths then there's a good chance the new people would leave, and who wants that? The modern church is extremely focused on numbers. The more people you can pack in the better – and the easiest way to do that is to water down the truth and make it acceptable to everyone. So that's what churches do.

But that's not what Christ did! He knew that many of those who were following Him didn't actually believe in Him at all, so He deliberately preached something hard in order to get the false converts to leave. He only wanted *genuine* converts, not phonies. He used hard doctrine to separate the wheat from the chaff. The modern church would never dream of doing that today. What God wants us to do, and what the church is actually doing, are two very different things.

Altar calls are a great tool if your goal is to maximize the number of people in your pews. However, if you're trying to create genuine Christians who will stand the test of time then they're a terrible thing to use – *especially* when used in the careless way in which so many churches use them. As we can see, Christ took a radically different approach!

Do you want to save people? Then preach the gospel to them. Make sure that people understand it – *all* of it. Preach the hard truths. Tell them that genuine conversions result in a changed life which bears the fruits of the Spirit. Those who believe will come to Christ and truly be saved – and those who don't will be offended and driven away. Offending people may seem like a bad thing to do, but it's *far* better than making them think they're saved when they actually aren't. After all, it's *much* easier for someone who knows that they're lost to come to Jesus, than someone who's convinced they were saved at the altar when they really weren't.

## Modern Sermons Are Shallow

Sometimes when we're reading the Bible we come across passages that ought to startle us. The Bible says some pretty amazing things if we'll take the time to stop and think about what it's saying. All too often we simply read right over a passage without giving it any thought.

For example, after Nehemiah finished rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, he did something else of great importance: he teamed up with Ezra to read the entire Mosaic Law to the people. Just stop and think about that for a moment! Imagine reading the *entire* Mosaic Law at once. That's quite a task!

The reason he did that was because the people of Jerusalem weren't very familiar with it. The Jews had been committing all kinds of sins, and living lives that didn't please God. To solve that problem Nehemiah and Ezra taught the people what God's commandments actually were:

**Nehemiah 8:2:** "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; ...

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And

all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

7 ... and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.

8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

As you can see, the Levites put a lot of effort into this. They read the entire law of God, leaving nothing out. They read it distinctly so it could be understood. They also expounded upon the law so that people could understand what it actually meant. They wanted to make sure that everyone had heard the Mosaic Law and understood what it required.

Now, this was no small task. The Mosaic Law is much longer than just the 10 commandments; it contains a great many other rules as well. Anyone who has tried to read through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy knows just how many commandments there actually are. While it's true that much of Leviticus deals primarily with priestly matters and regulations regarding sacrifices, there are *still* a lot of commandments in those four books.

The process of reading the Law would obviously have taken more than just a few minutes. We can see in Nehemiah 8:3 that Ezra read "from morning to midday". In other words, this process took *hours*. This wasn't a 30-minute sermon! I'd also like to point out that this was *not* light reading material: after all, it was an exposition on the Mosaic Law. It didn't have any funny stories and it was *not* entertaining. If you've ever read those four books of the Bible then you know exactly what I'm talking about. That material is difficult, hard to read, and at times hard to

understand.

Yet how did the people respond? Well, we're told in Nehemiah 8:3 that even though this process took hours, all of the people listened attentively. In fact, they paid so much attention that they became convicted of their sins and began to weep:

**Nehemiah 8:9:** "And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."

Not only did people pay attention for *hours* as the Levites expounded upon the *entire* Mosaic Law to them, but they also applied it to their lives and realized that they fell short! The people were so overcome by the magnitude of their sin that they began to weep. That's how much of an impact this had on them!

Do you know what would happen if someone tried something like this today? Imagine for a moment a pastor telling his congregation that he was going to spend the next 4 hours preaching a sermon on the entire Mosaic Law. If any pastor was foolish enough to try something like that, he would probably find himself out of a job. The congregation would bounce him right out of the pulpit and into the parking lot, and his days at that church would be over. There would be a riot!

The reason the congregation would riot is because modern Christians tend to have incredibly short attention spans when it comes to spiritual issues. Yes, the congregation will sit there while the pastor preaches a 30-minute sermon, but the odds are good they're not going to pay much attention to what he's saying. Instead of taking notes you'll find people balancing their checkbooks or just sleeping through the message. There are

a few people who will pay attention to it, but those are the exceptions. Many people will have already forgotten most of what he said by the time they get out to the parking lot. If the preacher dares to go over 30 minutes then people will start to complain. Even going over the allotted time by seven minutes is enough to get people upset. However, if the pastor's sermon is short – say he only talks for 20 minutes instead of 30 – then there will be rejoicing. People love short sermons and dislike long ones. This is true no matter how good the sermon is or how relevant it may be to their lives.

Why is this? The answer is pretty clear: people have a very limited appetite for preaching. Interestingly, I've never heard anyone complain that a service had too much singing. It's common for people to sit through an hour-long musical presentation at church without making a single complaint – but if the pastor ever tried to preach for an hour there would be a lot of unhappiness. The reason for this is simple: people like to listen to music, and they don't like to listen to preaching.

Now, I don't think it's *just* a problem of attention spans. After all, the same people who complain if a sermon goes five minutes over its expected time are willing to stay up until two in the morning if the baseball game they're watching goes into nine extra innings. They'll gladly watch a three-hour-long movie, or spend six solid hours watching reruns of television shows they've seen a dozen times before. When it comes to something *they actually care about*, time is no object. People who would riot at the thought of a four-hour sermon have no problem spending four hours watching a football game. It's easy to understand why: they believe that football is fun and exciting, and they believe that sermons (even really good ones) are kind of boring. People want to limit their intake of sermons.

I understand that there are some terrible preachers out there. I've heard pastors preach long sermons when they had nothing to say, and it was pretty painful. If your point can be

made in 10 minutes then make your point and stop. Don't stretch it out just to hear yourself talk.

But the problem that we have in our churches is not a dislike of *bad* sermons, but a dislike of sermons altogether. Many people who go to church have very little interest in hearing the Word of God preached (which goes back to the fact that congregations are composed of a "mixed multitude" of saved people and unsaved people). This is in stark contrast to the people we find in the Bible, who *did* care and who *did* pay attention.

As we can see in the example of Nehemiah, the people stood there for *hours* and listened. They cared about what was being said so much that they were overcome by conviction. They took the message to heart. King Josiah had the same reaction when the Mosaic Law was read to him:

**2 Kings 22:8:** "And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. . .

10 And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

11 And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.

12 And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,

13 Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words

of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us."

Here we have another instance where someone read the *entire* Law! In this case the Mosaic Law was read to King Josiah. What was the king's reaction? The Bible says he was so overcome that he rent his clothes. Not only did he pay attention, but he understood what the Law meant. He knew that his nation had been disobedient and was in danger of facing the wrath of God. Conviction had set in and he knew the nation was in a lot of trouble.

I realize these are exceptional cases. The Israelites didn't have the entire Law read to them on a regular basis – but when it was read, they listened. Have you ever tried to read the entire Mosaic Law in one sitting? I can't imagine any congregation allowing their pastor to read the whole thing to them in a single service; they would revolt. It simply wouldn't be tolerated. By modern standards that would be seen as a terrible sermon: dry, boring, and lacking amusing anecdotes. But when Shaphan the scribe read it to King Josiah, it had such a huge impact on him that it changed the course of the nation.

Do you know why? It's because Josiah cared deeply about honoring God with his life, whereas many people in our churches primarily care about being entertained. That's why Josiah eagerly listened to an hours-long recitation of hundreds of commands. His goal in life was *not* the pursuit of entertainment, but the pursuit of God. That's what he was passionate about.

Many people in our congregations primarily want to be entertained. If a sermon is fun then they will listen to it for a short time, but it had better be short or they will lose interest. Many Christians are focused on the pursuit of pleasure instead of the pursuit of God. This is why they have no patience for long messages. They have *lots* of attention for things that they care about, but God had better keep His messages short and fun.



Did you know that Joshua also read the entire Mosaic Law to the people? In fact, when he read the Law there were children present (as we discussed earlier in this series):

**Joshua 8:34:** "And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them."

These children weren't sent off to children's church to get a more entertaining message. No, they had to behave and listen while Joshua spent *hours* reading the Law to them. That's pretty remarkable, isn't it?

This wasn't just an Old Testament thing. The apostle Paul also preached rather long sermons:

**Acts 20:7:** "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

Incidentally, his sermon didn't stop at midnight. He actually kept preaching until the following morning:

**Acts 20:11:** "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed."

Can you imagine what would happen if the apostle Paul came to one of our modern churches and tried to preach a sermon that lasted *until morning of the next day*? I suspect the congregation's reaction would *not* be pretty! Now, if people were watching a baseball game and it didn't finish until after midnight, then people will stay up for that because it's baseball. But a *sermon* lasting that long is completely out of the question. Didn't Paul care about those poor people in the audience?

I'm not saying that all of Paul's sermons were this long, and I'm also not suggesting that short sermons are evil. There's nothing wrong with preaching short messages, and in many cases that is very appropriate. If what you want to say can be said in just a few words then do that and don't drag it out! There's also the fact that (as we discussed earlier in this series) these sermons were probably interactive. The Levites who read the entire Mosaic Law to the people expounded on it. Things back then weren't like they are today, where people had to sit in silence. People were allowed to ask questions and get clarification. My point is that some of the sermons we find in the Bible were very long, and in spite of their great length they powerfully impacted the people who heard them. Yet if that same message was preached today the church would never tolerate it because of its length! Something has changed, and it's not the Word of God.

Do you know why Paul was able to preach to that group for so long? It's because they had a genuine heart for God and cared about what the apostle was saying. Christians used to care deeply about the things of God. For example, a 13th century Catholic Inquisitor by the name of Reinerius said this about the Waldensians:

"They can repeat *by heart*, in the vulgar tongue, the whole text of the New Testament and great part of the Old: and, adhering to the text alone,

they reject decretals and decrees with the sayings and expositions of the Saints" (Faber, p. 492).

These days many Christians haven't even bothered to *read* the entire Bible. Yet these 13<sup>th</sup> century Christians cared so much about the Word of God that they actually memorized *virtually the entire Book* – and this was during a time when owning a single page of the Bible could get them burned at the stake! Their passion for Bible study actually endangered their lives. Many of them were killed for it – and yet they weren't deterred. Even though owning a Bible was punishable by death, they still owned them, studied them, and memorized them. *That* is how much they cared!

Can you imagine these devoted Christians limiting sermons to 30 minutes and complaining if they went five minutes over? Can you imagine this group becoming irritated if the pastor spent a few minutes too long expounding on what the Word of God had to say? Of course not – it would be unthinkable to them. Things are different today, aren't they?

There is a preacher online who I enjoy listening to, who preaches sermons that are an hour and 45 minutes long. Since he has so much time he's able to go into incredible detail. What people don't realize is that if you only have 30 minutes to cover an entire passage then you're not going to be able to say very much about it. Imagine taking a 2-hour movie and cutting it down to half an hour. You're going to lose a lot when you do that! However, if you have more time then you can accomplish a lot more. Think of it this way: if you have to cover all 12 chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes in four 30-minute sessions then you are going to be extremely limited in how much you can bring out. More time would make a big difference – but Christians are unwilling to devote serious amounts of time to studying the Word of God. People claim that they simply don't have the time,

but I find that hard to believe. According to Nielsen, the average American watches *34 hours* of television a week. Why is it out of the question to sacrifice ten of those minutes to give the preacher a little more time?

The real problem is that many people in our churches find the Word of God boring. They just don't really care about it, and they have no passion for spiritual things. They have lots of time for secular things that they find entertaining, but they have no interest in reading their Bibles, or studying them, or tolerating a sermon that's longer than a half-hour TV sitcom. People are passionate about things, but God is not on that list. People praise God with their lips during the Sunday morning service, but their hearts are far from Him. It's easy to see where their heart truly lies: just look at where they spend their time!

If only people cared as much about the Bible as our forefathers did, how different things would be! Maybe then people wouldn't go around thinking that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.

## **Churches Must Not Form Alliances With The Ungodly**

In modern times it's common for Christian groups to join forces with non-Christian organizations in order to accomplish some social goal – be it protesting some injustice, or feeding the hungry, or whatever the hot topic of the day might be. Christians will join with Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, Jews, and whoever else they can find in order to accomplish their goals. The justification for this is that while we may have differences we can all agree on this one thing, so why not work together to accomplish it?

The answer is simple: it's because the Bible forbids it. Our generation has forgotten the principle of separation, and the

consequences have been devastating. The church needs to learn that ecumenicism – the idea that we should all get along and work together no matter what we believe – doesn't come from God. In fact, God is so opposed to it that He promised to curse those who are involved in such things.

I realize that's a strong statement, so let's look at the evidence. In 2 Chronicles 18 we can find the story of Jehoshaphat and Ahab. Jehoshaphat was a wise and godly king who the Lord gave great riches and honor. Ahab was an incredibly evil king who was married to the even-more-evil Jezebel. Despite their differences, Jehoshaphat thought it would be a good idea to join forces with Ahab and attack their common enemy:

**2 Chronicles 18:1-3:** "Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramothgilead. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramothgilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war."

This is exactly the sort of thing that the modern church does. Jehoshaphat was good and Ahab was evil; Jehoshaphat worshiped the true God while Ahab worshiped pagan gods. Since they had a common enemy, Jehoshaphat thought it made sense for them to team up and work together. After all, the Syrians were dangerous and posed a threat to both kings. As the modern church would say, this is the Lord's battle, and if we can get unbelievers to join us in our fight then so much the better!

Except the battle did not go well. If you read chapter 18 you'll see that the prophet Micaiah warned against going to war at all, and prophesied that Ahab would be killed. Sure enough, Ahab actually was killed in that battle. When Jehoshaphat returned home, the prophet Jehu rebuked the king for joining forces with Ahab:

**2 Chronicles 19:1-2:** "And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

The Lord was *not at all* pleased that Jehoshaphat had made an alliance with Ahab. Even though they had a common enemy, Jehoshaphat was forbidden from joining forces with the wicked. The Lord didn't see it as two people attacking a common problem; He saw it as helping the ungodly and aiding those who hate the Lord. What the Lord focused on was the fact that *Jehoshaphat helped Ahab*, a king who hated God. What Jehoshaphat helped him do was beside the point. The Lord was upset that he had helped Ahab *at all*. Because of this, as the prophet Jehu said, "therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

Some may wonder, didn't the Lord command us to pray for our enemies and do good to them that hate us? Yes, He did. But the Lord did *not* command us to *join forces with them and help them accomplish their goals*. That is an entirely different matter! That's what Jehoshaphat did, and the Lord was very upset about it. The fact that the Syrians were evil and were also Jehoshaphat's enemy didn't matter to God at all.

Let's look at another case. After Ahab died another king

arose named Ahaziah, who was also very wicked. Jehoshaphat thought it would be a good idea for the two of them to join forces and send some ships to Ophir to get gold (1 Kings 22:48). Once again we see a godly king teaming up with an evil king in order to accomplish something. Now, there was nothing wrong with going to Ophir for gold; King Solomon also sent ships out looking for treasure and acquired great wealth. Jehoshaphat thought that if both kings teamed up then they could both be enriched.

However, the Lord was not pleased:

**2 Chronicles 20:35-37:** "And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongaber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish."

What upset the Lord was *not* the purpose of the voyage. No, what really upset God was that Jehoshaphat had teamed up with the evil king Ahaziah. Because Jehoshaphat joined himself with a pagan king who hated God, the Lord destroyed the ships they had made. The Lord *hates* it when His people team up with His enemies in order to accomplish something. It doesn't matter if their stated goal is something that's actually good. *He hates it!* In fact, He hates it so much that He promises *wrath* on those who dare to do such things. In the example above, God was so upset at their partnership that He actually destroyed the ships.

This same principle is repeated in the New Testament:

**II Corinthians 6:14-17:** "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."

People commonly apply this to marriage, but *Paul was not talking about marriage*. Marriage isn't even mentioned anywhere in the chapter! What Paul is saying is that Christians should *not join forces with pagans*. As Paul points out, light has no communion with darkness and righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness. They are *different teams entirely* and they are not to be "yoked together".

How many times did the apostles join forces with pagans in order to accomplish societal goals? *Zero times*. How many times did the church in the New Testament join with idol-worshippers to stamp out poverty, feed the hungry, or pursue some other goal? *Zero times*. Instead Paul condemns this practice – just as the practice was condemned in the Old Testament. God wants His people to be *separate* from the world. He doesn't want them building alliances with the wicked; instead He wants His followers to "come out from among them, and be ye separate".

This principle of separation is no longer followed by the modern church. It has ignored the clear teaching of 2 Corinthians



6:14-17. In fact, the church thinks it's *great* when they can team up with God-hating organizations in order to get things done! What God has to say about it is entirely forgotten – but God doesn't mince words about this:

**2 John 1:10-11:** "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

How does God say we should treat those who preach a false gospel? Does He say that we should join forces with them and try to find areas of commonality so we can build agreements? Nope. What He actually says is that we shouldn't even receive them into our home. In fact, we *shouldn't even bid them "godspeed"!*

Now, when John says "receive him not into your house" he's not forbidding us from sharing the gospel with them. What he *is* forbidding is helping them in any way, either in deed (by giving them a place to stay so they can keep preaching a false gospel) or in word (by bidding them godspeed). John is clear that those who help them, even verbally, become a "partaker of his evil deeds".

Sadly, this is a sin that the modern church *loves* to commit. I once saw a case where a church learned that a mosque was undergoing renovations, so they invited the Muslims to *borrow their church building* so they could keep worshiping their false god. That's exactly the sort of thing that John was condemning – but instead of being dismayed, churches brag about this sinful behavior as a great example of "outreach" and "building bridges" and "true love". God, however, calls it *being a partaker of their evil deeds* and hates it with a passion.

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate", says

the Lord. That is the commandment! God repeats it in Revelation and adds a threat:

**Revelation 18:4:** "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

In this case the verse is talking about Babylon, the mother of harlots and abominations. God is commanding His people to come out of that wicked place and "be not partakers of her sins" – for those who *are* partakers of her sins will also partake of the plagues that God will send upon her. How do we become partakers of her sins? By joining forces with her and helping her in word or deed. We become partakers with the wicked when we refuse to separate ourselves from them.

The modern church has decided that it's not interested in separation, and instead eagerly tries to form alliances with as many God-hating organizations as it can possibly find. The church has no idea how much this angers God. The Lord didn't hesitate to discipline the righteous king Jehoshaphat when he committed this sin, and that is something we should take to heart.

## **The Importance Of Calling Out False Teachers By Name**

Here's a question for you: is it right or is it wrong to call out false teachers by name? In the world today there are many people who call themselves Christian pastors who teach dangerous, heretical doctrines. Some of these teachers reject the Bible outright and claim that we need to look elsewhere for the truth. Others teach things that are contrary to the Bible or twist the Scriptures to their own ends. For example, there are pastors

who deny the virgin birth, the resurrection, the identity of Jesus as God, the reality of Hell, and that salvation comes only through Jesus – just to name a few common heresies! Such people abound in today's world and have led many astray.

The question is, what should be done about it? Some pastors teach that it's wrong to ever call anyone a false teacher. They say that calling someone a false teacher is the same thing as judging them, and Christians "aren't supposed to judge people." In their opinion the best thing to do is ignore them entirely. At most they might address the false teaching, but they never address the false teacher.

Others say that we should live by Thumper's motto. The rabbit from Bambi famously said that "if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." I've heard people seriously suggest that this philosophy should guide everything we say. In other words, if we don't have anything nice to say about someone then it's best to keep silent. Calling someone a false teacher isn't nice, so we shouldn't say it. I'd like to point out that failing to deal with a situation is no different from ignoring it. The results are the same.

All of this brings up a question: what did people do about this problem in the Bible? Is this policy of ignoring false teachers actually Biblical? It's an excellent question, and fortunately it's easy to answer.

First of all, Jesus Himself made it quite plain where He stood. The Lord didn't hesitate to condemn false teachers in the strongest possible terms:

**Matthew 23:27:** "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous

unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. ...

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

As you can see, Jesus didn't mince words! He called the Pharisees hypocrites and a generation of vipers, and He did it *while they were standing there listening to Him*. There was nothing remotely "nice" about what He said! He actually told them, to their face, that they were very wicked men who were headed straight for Hell. The Lord *definitely* confronted both the false teaching *and* the false teacher.

Of course, Jesus was God, and that's an important distinction. Jesus has a right to judge everyone, and one day we will stand before Him and be held accountable for the way we've lived our life. God has every right to judge mankind, so the fact that He exercises that right shouldn't come as a surprise.

So let's look at another example. What did the apostles do when they were confronted with this sort of situation? Did they believe that confronting false teachers was wrong? Did they live by the "be nice at all costs" motto? Actually, they did not. For example, Paul had quite a bit to say about someone named Alexander:

**I Timothy 1:19-20:** "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."

**2 Timothy 4:14:** "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:"

These are remarkable statements! Not only did Paul call Alexander out by name as an evil person (which isn't a "nice" thing to say!), but he said that he *delivered him over to Satan*. Before you panic, I'd like to point out that the reason Paul did this was so that Alexander could learn not to blaspheme. Paul hoped that by doing this Alexander would come to regret what he'd done and would repent of his sins. However, Alexander apparently didn't learn anything because in 2 Timothy Paul once again mentioned Alexander's wickedness and asked God to avenge Paul for all the evil things Alexander had done do him.

We can see that the apostle Paul called out two false teachers by name (Hymenaeus and Alexander). Paul didn't restrain himself to just addressing the false teachings themselves, and he didn't say "Well, let's be nice about it." Paul never said anything remotely like "Even though some people are teaching false doctrines, it would be wrong and judgmental to call them out on it. We need to get along with such people and be nice to them." No, Paul was pretty direct in saying that Alexander was evil and people needed to be aware of who he was and what he was doing.

This is not the only example of this that we can find in the Bible! There are many more cases where the apostles called out someone for being a false teacher or an evildoer:

**Galatians 2:11:** "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."

**2 Timothy 4:10:** "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia."

**III John 1:9-10:** "I wrote unto the church: but

Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

This isn't just limited to the New Testament; you can find the same thing in the Old Testament as well. For example, Nehemiah names quite a few names:

**Nehemiah 13:7-8:** "And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber."

**Nehemiah 13:28-29:** "And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites."

Another place where you can find this is in the Psalms. In fact, there's a whole class of psalms called imprecatory psalms, in which the psalmist asks God to avenge him for some evil that was done to him. For example, one psalmist wrote this:

**Psalm 69:22-28:** "Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have

been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous."

That's some pretty harsh language! Now, lest we think that these verses were simply the ravings of a godless lunatic, it's worth noting that we find the same sort of thing going on *in Heaven*. Take a look at what the book of Revelation has to say:

**Revelation 6:9-10:** "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

**Revelation 11:16-18:** "And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and

thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth."

**Revelation 16:5-7:** "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

I realize that we've strayed a little bit from the original topic, but there's an important point here. The modern church has been infiltrated with the idea that its primary role in life is to be *nice*. Calling out false teachers for heresy isn't nice, so many people say we shouldn't do it. Asking God for vengeance is *especially* not nice. The church believes that it needs to be nice at all times and never say anything that isn't positive and uplifting.

If you look at the Bible, however, it becomes obvious that this philosophy isn't the least bit Biblical. We aren't called to be nice; we're called to be loving, and that's an entirely different matter! There's nothing loving about refusing to tell people that sins are sinful. After all, the wages of sin is death! If you don't call out sin then you're allowing it to continue to claim one souls after another. Condemning it and urging people to repent of it is the only way to save them from its terrible consequences. We *must* call it out!

Likewise, there's nothing loving about refusing to



confront false teachers. Life isn't a game where everyone goes to the same place after death and receives the same meaningless prize. We are playing for keeps, and the reward is either everlasting life in paradise or everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire. There's no middle road or neutral ground! False teachers are denying everlasting life to millions of people and sending them down the road to Hell. They're like angry bears roaming around in crowded neighborhoods, looking for the weak and disabled so they can tear them limb from limb. If there was a rabid bear in your neighborhood you wouldn't ignore it on the grounds that we should be nice to bears; instead you would hide your children and then call animal control so they could capture the bear before it hurts anyone.

Refusing to name false teachers is devastating for many reasons. If no one confronts them then how will they learn that what they're doing is wrong? If no one names them then how will those who are weak or new to the faith find out that they should be avoided? There's nothing loving about refusing to warn people against people who teach that there's no Hell or judgment for sin. How many people are going to hear these false teachers and go away deceived because no one warned them? How many souls will be lost forever because those who knew better refused to do something about it?

The call to be loving means that sometimes we have to engage in behaviors that aren't very "nice". Paul really did turn Alexander over to Satan, but the reason he did it was in the hope that Alexander might learn the error of his ways and change. Would it really have been better if instead Paul had done nothing and let Alexander continue down the road to eternal damnation?

Now, I realize that the imprecatory Psalms are a bit different. The key there is to realize that while God forbids *us* from taking revenge, He does *not* rebuke our thirst for justice. What God says is that when we've been wronged we should allow the Lord to take care of it. Those who have been martyred

for the cause of Christ *do* thirst for justice to be done, as we saw in Revelation 6:9-10. The Lord doesn't rebuke this desire but instead promises that justice *will* be done. One day He will avenge His children, but that's a topic for another time.

Refusing to confront false teachers may be "nice", but there's nothing loving about it. I fear that our refusal to combat false teachings *and* those who teach them only makes it easier for false teachers to guide millions of people down the road to Hell. After all, if you refuse to tell campers that a vicious wolf is roaming their campground, what do you think is going to happen? Is being "nice" really worth all the souls that it's going to cost?

## What "Worship" Actually Means

It's pretty universal for churches refer to their Sunday morning services as "Worship services". I have to ask, though: are they really *worship* services? I'm not convinced that the church actually understands what the word "worship" really means.

We can find the word "worship" many times throughout the Bible. For example, the wise men worshiped Jesus:

**Matthew 2:11:** "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh."

Does this mean the wise men sang Jesus some songs and then listened to a sermon? Nope. It means they literally bowed

down to Him.

Here's a time when a leper came to Jesus:

**Matthew 8:2:** "And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Did this leper sing a song to Jesus? No. He literally bowed down at His feet and then asked to be cured of his leprosy.

Here's a time when the disciples worshiped Jesus:

**Matthew 14:31-33:** "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God."

Did the disciples sing to Jesus? No. They bowed down at His feet in awe and amazement.

I could give a *lot* more examples, but I think you get the point. The Bible is extremely consistent in the way it uses the word "worship". That word does *not* mean to sing songs! We already have a word for that, and it is the word "praise". The word "worship" means to bow down to God.

When people gather together and sing hymns, are they worshipping Jesus? No, they are praising Him. Worship and praise are not the same! We worship Jesus when we bow down before Him. We worship Him when we do His will instead of our own. You will never find a "worship service" mentioned anywhere in the Bible. There are many times when people gather together to praise the Lord or listen to a sermon, but worship is something that each individual must do by themselves. It's not a group

activity! You must make the choice to walk in His ways instead of your own. You must choose to submit to Him in your life instead of doing whatever you please. Those are acts of worship! What happens in Sunday morning services are acts of *praise*, which is a group activity.

It's very easy to praise God without worshiping Him. In fact, God said that people do this all the time:

**Isaiah 29:13:** "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:"

Can you honor God with your lips while your heart is far from Him? Absolutely. I think that's very common in churches. Praise and worship are not the same thing, and churches shouldn't act like they're synonyms. If you come to church and sing a few praise songs, that doesn't mean that you've engaged in an act of worship. If you truly want to worship Jesus then you must submit to Him in your life and bow down to Him.

Churches should teach people what the word "worship" really means. We aren't doing people any favors by confusing the terms "worship" and "praise"! Churches do *not* have a "worship team". That whole concept doesn't even make sense! What churches have is a *praise* team. The fact that the word "worship" is so widely misused makes me think that people don't understand what worship is in the first place.

Should people praise God? Yes. Should people worship God? Yes. Are those two things the same? No, they are not.

## Conclusion

If you've made it this far then it should be obvious by now why I think the modern church is very unbiblical. I'm not saying that the *doctrines* of churches are unbiblical (although that may be true as well, depending on what denomination we're talking about). I am saying that the way people "do church" is completely unbiblical. Christians often say that the Bible is their sole guide for faith and practice, and claim that they want to obey the Bible and not go beyond it – but when it comes to the way we run our churches, we've tossed the Bible out completely and have come up with all sorts of traditions that have no Biblical support and cannot be justified. Our ways are *not* better than God's ways. The way we have come up with to "do church" is extremely ineffective and has had terrible consequences.

Is there any Biblical support for having church buildings? Nope. But we have them anyway, and we spend millions of dollars on them, and we go deep into debt to pay for them, and we ask the congregation to make huge sacrifices in order to fund them. These buildings are always growing larger and larger, and taking more time and resources to maintain and repair. The buildings are a huge burden and have led to a lot of other problems, but we want them anyway. If we met in people's homes, like *every church we find in the New Testament*, we would solve a whole host of problems. But that's not what we do.

Is there any Biblical support for a pastor to have a congregation of ten thousand people? Absolutely not. The whole job of a pastor is to know his sheep, and help them, and go after them when they're in trouble – but it's possible to attend a large church for *months* without the pastor even noticing you're there. If you want help from the church you're going to have to get in touch with someone yourself and make an appointment, and then possibly pay a fee for counseling services. The pastor

doesn't know who you are and doesn't have time for you, and he isn't going to think about you when crafting his sermons. He has thousands of people that he's preaching to, and he can't possibly deal with each person individually and work alongside them. This wouldn't be a problem if people met in small groups in their homes, but that's not the way we do things.

Is there any Biblical support for pastors delivering every single sermon as a monologue that must never be interrupted with questions or corrections? Nope. Some sermons in the Bible were long and others were short, but people were allowed to ask questions. Paul even told people to judge those who were speaking and correct them if they were wrong. In the modern church a pastor picks a sermon and preaches it to 3000 people in the hope that somehow there might be something in it for someone. If we had small home churches then the messages could actually be directed at the problems people were struggling with. People could ask questions and get clarification. They could actually learn something, instead of being lectured and then sent home to work out any problems on their own.

Is there any Biblical support for services being exactly an hour or two long? Nope. In the Bible services were as long as they needed to be. People gathered together and then remained together until they were done. They prayed as long as needed, and preached as long as needed, and talked as long as needed. Sometimes the service only lasted a few minutes and sometimes it lasted all night. The length didn't really matter. Is that how we do things? Absolutely not. Our services are planned out in advance, right down to every song that will be sung and every prayer that will be prayed and the exact list of points the pastor will make in his sermon. The service will start exactly on time and end exactly on time (with very little variation). The service is going to be exactly the same regardless of who shows up that day or what their needs are. The number of people who come (or don't come) has no impact on how the service unfolds at all.

There's no Biblical support for that, and no church in the Bible ever operated that way, but that's the way we do things today.

I could go on and on and on. Is there Biblical support for tithing? No. Is there Biblical support for pastors marrying people? No. Is there Biblical support for meeting exactly once a week on Sunday mornings? No. Is there Biblical support for voting in pastors and voting them out? No. Is there Biblical support for having the entire congregation sit passively during the service? No. Is there Biblical support for pastors switching jobs again and again until they reach the peak of their career and land a prestigious position at a megachurch? No. Is there Biblical support for separating children from their parents once the service starts, and dividing people into different age groups so they can all be taught separately? No. Is there Biblical support for opening up church services to people who aren't Christians at all, and never having any services or events that are only for believers? Nope. There's not even any Biblical support for calling part of the church building "the sanctuary" and designating it as a holy place (which is how many people view it). The building isn't "the church"! The *people* are the church. God doesn't dwell in the building; instead the Holy Spirit dwells within us. The sanctuary is not holy! Instead it is the *people* who are holy.

Yes, this land is full of buildings that are called churches. They have pastors that don't know the people who attend the services, because there are so many people attending that the pastor can't possibly get to know them. You can go into these buildings and attend the services, but you can't expect people to know when you're in trouble because it doesn't work that way. The pastor is probably not going to come looking for you if something bad happens, but if you fill out a form and schedule an appointment then maybe you can get some counseling (although you may be charged for it). You can hear sermons in these buildings, but the sermons aren't designed with you in mind and may have nothing to do with what's going on in your

life. If you've been going to church for a while then all the sermons will probably be things you've heard before. If you've been going a long time then you could probably give the sermon yourself because you already know all the points that are going to be made. You're essentially stuck in first grade forever because the pastor will never explore the Bible on a deeper level. He can't, because his church is full of people who aren't saved or who don't really care very much about Christianity.

If you go to a church service, you will be able to say hello to the person who has been sitting behind you for the past three years – but that will probably be the extent of your conversation. You will sing whatever songs you are told to sing, and you will pray whatever you are told to pray. If there's a responsive reading then you will say whatever the pastor wants you to say. You can give when the offering plate is passed around, and nearly all your money will go toward paying for the building and the salaries of the staff (some of whom may make significantly more money than you do). You can then sit quietly while the pastor preaches at you. Once the service is over and you've finally left the building you can then pray your own prayers and sing your own praises to God. You can study the Bible and have friends over and build relationships with them. You can talk to someone about your problems and help them with theirs. You can bear one another's burdens – but you're going to be doing it outside of the very expensive church building, because that's not what that building is for.

I've heard it said that fewer people go to church these days than they did in the past. What amazes me is that anyone goes to church at all! Why would you want to drive across town in order to sit passively for a few hours and then drive back home? How does that benefit anyone? If you go to a small group then you can help others and be helped in return, but you have no options to do anything in a church service. If you miss church for a month it won't negatively impact the service at all, because



there's nothing for you to do in the service but sit there quietly.

That might not be so bad if there was Biblical support for the way we conduct our services, *but there isn't*. In the Bible, services were held by small groups of people who met in homes. Christians talked to one another, and asked questions, and corrected one another, and helped one another. They noticed when there were problems and they went after the lost. They met frequently (on a daily basis, actually), they shared meals together all the time, and they were actively involved in each other's lives.

Are there congregations that manage to get to know each other and become close to one another in spite of all this? Sure – but that is happening *in spite* of the way they conduct their services, not because of them. The service is designed to keep everyone passive, and it does a really good job of that. The only thing people are asked to do is stand when they're told to stand, sit when they're told to sit, sing when they are told to sing, and be quiet when they're told to be quiet. You don't have to do anything in a service at all! In fact, you *can't*. The paid staff will handle it all for you. Your presence at the service is not going to make it better, and your absence will not make it worse. (Was that true in New Testament churches? Definitely not. But that's exactly how our services are designed to work.)

Is there Biblical support for that model? Nope – not even close. So why are churches structured this way? *Because that's what people want*. The modern church is governed by the congregation. They have the power to vote in deacons, elders, and pastors, and to vote them right back out again. If the people didn't like the way things were being done then they could change it – but they don't. The truth is that the modern church has a lot of aspects that appeal to the flesh. After all, no one is going to expect anything from you and you're not going to be asked to do anything. The services are going to be kept short, and you will know exactly when you're going to be leaving. You

don't have to establish close relationships with anyone or open up about your problems. You can keep living in sin all you want, and the chances are no one around you will even notice. The sermons are never going to challenge you, which means you don't have to worry about studying the Bible and making sure you know what's going on. All of the work will be done by other people, which gives you the freedom to sit there quietly and vegetate. You're also not going to be held accountable for anything! If the church does somehow get a pastor who's a real firebrand, they can just vote him out and replace him. The church will carefully insulate you from anything unpleasant and make sure you don't hear anything that you don't want to hear. If you don't have a passion for God and want to remain in your sins then the modern church is a dream come true.

It's also a great system for pastors. They get a large building, and a large ministry, and a large staff, and lot of resources to play with. I realize there are a lot of small churches that claim to not have very much money, but even "small" churches often have budgets of *hundreds of thousands of dollars per year* (which is probably *far more* than the budget of anyone in the congregation). Besides, there's always the dream of "striking it big" – and if a pastor realizes that his church isn't going to grow then he can just jump ship to a bigger one. No pastor is going to want to have a small house church when he could have a multi-million-dollar complex with a large full-time staff! There's no prestige in a small house church at all. No one is going to be impressed by a congregation of 15 people. It's true that small class sizes are *enormously* beneficial for *the people who are actually in those classes*, but I think it's safe to say that spiritual growth is pretty far down on the list of priorities for most churches. (I know that seems harsh, so here's a question for you. Which do you think is more helpful for spiritual growth: allowing questions during a service, or refusing them? Even *schools* allow students to ask questions, because it's so obvious

that it helps people understand the material – but not churches. What does that tell you about our priorities?)

The modern church is exactly the way that people want it to be. The problem is that *it's not the way God wants it to be*. The Lord has given us a pattern to follow in His Word, and He expects us to follow it. He's told us exactly how He wants the church to operate. Jesus has also told us what He will do if the church ignores Him and does whatever they want instead:

**Revelation 2:4-5:** "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

What did Jesus say He would do if the church didn't repent? He said He would remove it from His presence and cast it aside. Oh, the building might remain and the people might still show up, but from God's perspective it would no longer be a church at all. It would just be a group of people who were wasting their time doing things that God hated.

God commands us to walk in His ways. When are we going to stop and think about what we're doing and compare it to what the Bible has to say? If our traditions and ways of doing things have no Biblical basis then shouldn't we do something about that? Why are we fighting so hard to keep our church buildings when, honestly, we probably shouldn't have them in the first place? Why are we fighting so hard to make sure a church service is attended by 1500 people, when those people would be far better served if they were in a small group of only 15 people? Are we *really* serving God? Do we truly have the best interests of the congregation at heart?

I realize we have a lot of impressive buildings. There was once a time when the disciples tried to show Jesus how impressive Herod's temple was. Do you know what He had to say about that magnificent building which, at the time, was one of the greatest structures in the world?

**Mark 13:1-2:** "And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Do you think that God would have used the Romans to tear that temple apart stone from stone if that building was pleasing in His sight and a true house of prayer? I'm pretty sure the answer is *no*. God tore that temple apart because it was a den of thieves.

There may come a day when the government comes against our church buildings and tears them down. If that happens, I have to ask: is it possible that God is allowing the government to shut down the church because it stopped pleasing Him a long time ago? If our churches were firmly based on the Bible then that would be one thing – but are they? There are many people today who are fighting to preserve their church buildings. Wouldn't it be better to go back to the Bible and do things God's way instead?

# Resource 1: Chapter Summary

## 2 John

### II John 1

- THE ELDER UNTO THE ELECT LADY AND HER CHILDREN
- LOVE ONE ANOTHER
- MANY DO NOT CONFESS THAT JESUS IS COME IN THE FLESH; THIS IS A DECEIVER AND AN ANTICHRIST
- LOOK TO YOURSELVES THAT YOU DO NOT LOSE ANYTHING, BUT THAT YOU RECEIVE A FULL REWARD
- WHOEVER DOES NOT ABIDE IN THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST DOES NOT HAVE GOD
- IF ANYONE DOES NOT BRING THIS DOCTRINE, DO NOT RECEIVE HIM OR BID HIM GODSPEED, FOR HE WHO DOES SO IS PARTAKER OF HIS EVIL DEEDS
- I HAVE MANY THINGS TO WRITE, BUT INSTEAD OF WRITING I TRUST TO COME AND SPEAK FACE TO FACE
- THE CHILDREN OF YOUR ELECT SISTER GREET YOU

# Resource 3: The Teachings Of The Bible

## 2 John 1

- The book of 2 John was written by the apostle John, who referred to himself as "the elder" (probably because he wrote it near the end of his life, when he was quite old) (v1)
- This book is addressed to "the elect lady and her children", which is a cryptic reference to the church. (v1)
- The fact that John doesn't name the church makes me wonder if that church was undergoing severe persecution and John didn't want to risk naming them (v1)
- It's not a sin to hide during times of persecution, or to deliberately be cryptic in order to protect others (v1)
- John loved the church in the truth (v1)
- John deeply valued the truth and based his love for others in it (v1)
- All those who know the truth will love the church (v1)
- John refers to the church as a lady (which is a reference to the fact the church is the bride of Christ) (v1)
- John calls the church "the elect", which is a reference to our election of God; the Lord has chosen us (v1)
- John makes a reference to predestination in the very first verse of this book (v1)

- If a person does not love the church then they have not known the truth and do not know God (v1)
- The truth (of the gospel, and the Holy Spirit himself) dwells inside all genuine believers (v2)
- The Lord will be with all genuine believers forever (v2)
- Since no genuine believer can fall away and be lost, all genuine believers will always have the truth (v2)
- Those who appear to have had the truth but then fell away never actually had it at all (v2)
- The fact that the truth will be with us forever is a reference to "one saved always saved"; if the truth is with us forever then we cannot lose it, which means all genuine believers are safe and can never lose their salvation (v2)
- The apostle John prayed that the church would have grace, mercy, and peace (v3)
- John wanted the church to experience peace, not pain and persecution (v3)
- Grace, mercy, and peace are gifts that come from God the Father and God the Son (v3)
- Jesus is our Lord; we are to submit to Him and obey His commands (v3)
- Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ); He is the lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world (v3)
- Jesus is the divine Son of God (v3)
- Truth and love must go hand in hand (v3)
- The apostle John wanted the grace, mercy, and peace of

the church to be grounded on truth and love, not in sin or pragmatism or compromise (v3)

- John believed that it is a cause for great rejoicing when the church walks in the truth (v4)
- John wanted the church to walk in the truth, not in pragmatism or compromise or a love for this world (v4)
- The Father has commanded His church to walk in the truth (v4)
- The truth must be of paramount importance to the church (v4)
- It is not enough to just hear the truth; we must walk in it as well (v4)
- The truth must change how we live our lives (v4)
- The truth must be something that we greatly value (v4)
- We should rejoice when others walk in the truth, and we should strive to teach others the truth and show them how to walk in it (v4)
- The truth should be a priority to the church (v4)
- John commanded the people in the church to love one another (v5)
- The commandment to love one another is not something new; it was there from the very beginning (v5)
- The church must be characterized by both truth and love (v5)
- John refers to the church as a lady (for it is the bride of Christ) (v5)



- The definition of love is to walk in the commandments of God (v6)
- The commandments of God are the embodiment of love; they show us what true love is and how it works (v6)
- The commandment to love one another was given to us in the very beginning (v6)
- It is not enough to know the commandments; we must walk in them as well (v6)
- Walking in the commandments of God is not optional (v6)
- All believers must love one another, and that love must be demonstrated through obedience to God's commandments (v6)
- Those who do not obey God's commandments do not have love and are not displaying love (v6)
- Love is obedience to God (v6)
- The world is full of deceivers (v7)
- Those who deny what the Bible teaches about Jesus are deceivers (v7)
- Those who deny the deity of Jesus are deceivers (v7)
- Those who deny the humanity of Jesus are deceivers (v7)
- Those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah are deceivers (v7)
- Those who deny what the Bible teaches about Jesus are antichrists (in that they are opposed to the Christ) (v7)
- The church must be on guard against the many people in this world who try to deceive others about the nature of

## Jesus (v7)

- The apostle John believed that the doctrine about the person of Jesus was of supreme importance; those who got it wrong were called deceivers and antichrists (v7)
- John did not believe it was possible for a genuine Christian to fall away and lose his salvation, but he did believe that we could lose out on rewards (v8)
- John believed that we should strive to earn Heavenly rewards (v8)
- John believed that Heavenly rewards were worth having and striving for (v8)
- John believed it was a tragedy when Heavenly rewards were lost (v8)
- John believed that being deceived by false doctrine could cost people their Heavenly rewards (v8)
- John commanded people to be careful so that they were not deceived by false doctrine (v8)
- John believed that some people would lose Heavenly rewards (v8)
- John did not believe it was materialistic or unspiritual to be motivated by Heavenly rewards (v8)
- John believed that doctrine and truth were extremely important (v9)
- Those who reject the Bible's doctrines about Christ (His person, His work, His death and resurrection) do not have God and are not saved (v9)
- Those who reject what the Bible teaches about Jesus are

unsaved transgressors (v9)

- Those who have faith in Jesus and abide in Him have both Jesus and His Father (v9)
- Those who have the Son have the Father; those who reject the Son do not have the Father either (v9)
- The only way to the Father is through the Son (v9)
- The church must reject all those who reject the Bible's teachings about Jesus (v10)
- John taught that the church must never partner with those who reject any of the doctrines of Jesus; the church must not receive them or help them in any way (v10)
- If the church does partner with those who reject some aspect of what the Bible teaches about Jesus then the church becomes guilty of sin, for it is helping antichrists (v10)
- Those who deceive others about the nature of Christ are committing evil deeds, and those who aid them in any way become partakers in those evil deeds (v10)
- It is not kindness when the church forms alliances with non-Christian groups; it is a terrible sin in the sight of God (v10)
- The Lord even holds us accountable for our words (such as bidding those who are anti-Christ "godspeed") (v10)
- The church must not be a partaker of evil by giving aid to those who are leading people away from Christ (v10)
- The church must take a firm stand against all those who deny the Biblical doctrines about Christ (v10)

- The apostle John had many things to tell the church, but he preferred to do it in person instead of by letter (v12)
- John wrote his letters with paper and ink (v12)
- John wanted to visit the church so that he could speak to them face to face (v12)
- John believed that personal visits to the churches were a cause for great joy (v12)
- John sent greetings to the church from "thy elect sister", which may have been a reference to a different sister church or even perhaps the Jews (v13)
- John closed his letter with "amen" (let it be) (v13)
- John opened his letter with a reference to election (predestination) and he closed it with one as well (v13)
- John believed that sending greetings in letters was a meaningful thing to do (v13)
- John was clear about the doctrine he was teaching, but he was cryptic about the identities of the individuals involved, most likely to protect them in times of persecution; this was not seen as being fearful or lacking courage (v13)
- There is nothing wrong with keeping things short (v13)

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