

The Church Prepared



For the
Return of
Christ

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As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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to be "sold" for any price (2 Corinthians 2:17, Matthew 10:8).

(NOTE: I offer this writing in what little I know about humility, in
"weakness and fear and with much trembling," as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2.
My heart is not to charge or complain or judge. Yet my desire is surely to
challenge, and to express "to whom it may concern" the direction my life
has taken by God's grace. May all of God's Family who happen across this
writing be encouraged into greatness. Great eloquence and impressiveness
have I none. But what I have I give to you. In the Name of Jesus Christ of
Nazareth, Rise Up.)

...A message of focus and challenge for the Restoration

Part I

THE HEART OF GOD FOR THE CHURCH OF HIS SON

What is all of this "religion" stuff about anyway? What is God doing
in this earth? Where do we fit in? Has God changed since the first century,
A.D.? Have we? Here are some observations:

- (1) God's heart is strongly inclined towards an "increasing government," "all
nations streaming" into His Kingdom (Isa. 9:7; 2:2). His deepest nature
longs to "give increase," to "build His church" and to bring converts
to His Son "daily" in "great multitudes" (1 Cor. 3:6; Mat. 16:18; Acts
2:47; 16:5; 5:14; 6:7; Heb.2:10). God wants this far more than even we
do—that was the very purpose of sending His Son—"to seek and save
the lost." God's heart has always been to save multitudes. Even Jesus'
return at the trumpet blast is seemingly tied somehow to the massive

movement of His disciples advancing His Kingdom (2 Peter 3:9; 3:12a; Mt.24:14). God wants that even more than we do.

- (2) People have not changed in their needs, their nature or their lostness since the first century.
- (3) The Word of God and the Holy Spirit are no less “living and active” than they were in the first century.
- (4) Christ will never come back for a weak and impotent, inconsequential church that has no purity or zeal or personality. He won't return for His “Bride” until she “has made herself ready.” She'll be “prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband,” “a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Rev. 19:7; 21:2; Eph. 5:27). She'll be “established as chief among the mountains,” a magnificent “city set on a hill”—not an also-ran religious organization (Isa. 2:2; Mt. 5:14-16). Christ is coming back for the Bride the King of Kings deserves: a woman of distinction and personality and tenderness and enthusiasm. She is not simply “hanging around” in poverty and lukewarmness until Jesus comes back to bail her out. (Jesus Himself said that His People living in the power of His Spirit was to be even better than His physical presence! John 16:7, etc.) Like her Lord, she'll not seek political clout or social utopia. Nevertheless, (also like her Lord) **she'll shine with the “no beauty or majesty” Glory of God!** Born in an animal trough, riding on a borrowed donkey, shamed by men, buried in a borrowed tomb. And “raised by God, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that she should be held by it!” She's becoming a special, special Lady. He'll accomplish this in the earth—with us, or without us. The Father will raise up a Bride to reign in eternity with His Son. Personally, I want to be in on it!
- (5) The church of the first century continually saw the power of God, though it was filled with humans no different in potential from us. That church saw the power of God in their relationships (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37), in their witnessing (Acts 4:31; Col. 4:4; Col. 1:27-29; Acts 13:9-10), in conversions (Acts 2:41; 6:7), and even in their discipline with Ananias and Sapphira and others (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:29-32).

Here's the bottom line: God longs to build His church and prepare the Bride for the wedding banquet. He has been providentially involved in its growth in the early years. People are no different today—no less able to be captivated by God's Love and His Spirit (Acts 2:47; Jn.12:32; 16:8;

1 Cor. 12:3). So how come this God who craves to “build His church” (who, in fact, assured us that He would) isn't doing it right now?

PART II GOD WON'T BUILD ON SAND

The title really says it all, but I can't bear to stop there! God craves to “bring many Sons to Glory” (Heb. 2:10) He is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). It is also true, as we've seen, that “God gives the increase” and “the Lord added to their number daily.” More on this later, but the phenomenal “church growth” of the early church was not dependent in any way on slick methodology or props or systems. Instead, they were fully dependent on the providential Hand of a merciful God Who could even take the feeble efforts of a handful of uneducated fishermen (Acts 4:13) and bless them beyond all they could “ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20). God was in it. Why?

The Foundation Was Right

Peter and John never seemed to be too concerned with “church growth” and yet the results were probably on the order of 20,000 conversions and dozens of new churches (“Lampstands”) in the first ten years. Not bad. What was their emphasis? What is the Foundation that God demands before He unleashes His infinite blessings?

“If a man cleanses himself, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, and holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work” (2 Tim. 2:21).

“The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me—I have been blameless before Him and have kept myself from sin” (2 Sam. 22:17-25).

God looked down and saw His people gathered continually. He saw them of “one accord.” He saw them as a people of prayer and faith to see the unseen, and surrendered to a life of holiness in His sight.... It was now His Timing and He found that He could afford to bless them by pouring out something that could not be explained by statistics or sociological studies, by demographics or man-made religion.

A trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance: “God can use a gold cup, a silver cup or even a Dixie cup—but He will **NOT** use a dirty cup.”

God has largely withheld His awesome presence (1Cor.5:4; 14:25) because of the slackness and compromise, the utter lack of faith and holiness (and the confrontation of those things) in the religious system. Ananias and Sapphira would have loved today’s church. In most churches of our generation Ananias would be way down on the list of people deserving to be executed. In fact, even with much bigger flaws than telling “little white lies,” Ananias would likely be considered as “Elder material.” “After all,” cry the lukewarm and disobedient religionists, “don’t be so judgmental. He’ll grow into it. We’re all human you know. And besides, look at his devotion to Jesus—he sold his property to give to the church!”

Actually, “We’re only human!” is a contradiction of Jesus and the Bible! If we are really sold out to Christ, we are “partakers of the divine nature.” The “fullness of the Deity” is God’s gift to us! (Col. 1:27; 2:9-10; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19; 2 Peter 1:4). Let us, as Paul and Jesus said, live that way!

Ananias and Sapphira found out that they were without excuse.

If you are a Christian, a disciple, you and all of the selfishness in your heart, the ugly attitudes and thoughts, and all that is not in the nature of God have been and are being dethroned and crucified. There is no other definition in the Word of God for “Christianity” (Luke 14:33; Mt. 13:44; Mk. 10:19-22; Mt. 10:34-39).

Our Father has infinite patience and mercy for the weak and those maimed by the evil one. Jesus’ very purpose for coming here to earth was to “proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to release the oppressed,” not to “break the bruised reed” ever (2 Peter 3:9; Heb. 12:12-13; Ezek. 34:1-6; Lk. 4:18; Mt. 12:20). We also long to have the “same attitude of Christ Jesus,” to “make ourselves nothing,” “slaves of all,” as wounded healers and wound healers—never “embittering” those God has brought into our lives by judging their motives (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; Col. 3:21; 1 Cor. 4:3-5).

There is, however, a VAST difference between falling while craving the right thing and living in compromise and rationalization and lukewarmness (a little hot, a little cold)—that makes Christ sick (Rev. 3:21; 3:1-2). If we live for pleasure in this world, we “become an enemy of God” and are “dead even while we live” (James 4:4; 1 Tim. 5:6).

What I’m saying is this: God’s purpose throughout history has been to gather to Himself a people who have **FREELY CHOSEN** to follow Him—without rationalization, and without procrastination. He has won our hearts and we follow the Lamb wherever He goes with eagerness, love, sincerity, and humility (Rev.14:4; Mat.10:34-39; Ex. 19:5-6; Heb. 10:26; Titus 2:12-14; 1 Tim. 1:5-7). He’ll bless such as these “100 fold in this present age” and then give them “in the age to come, eternal life” (Heb. 11:6; Mk. 10:29-30).

The people who God can afford to bless will be an obedient, submissive, loving, compassionate people who lift up Christ in His Majesty as the reigning Lord, and realize that not one word of His is up for a vote! To those of us who recognize what the Father has done in Christ, our Jesus will not be just a figurehead King. It means nothing to dress Jesus up in a robe, put a crown on His head, sing songs to Him—and then make all of our own decisions apart from Him. It can’t be!

The Lordship of Christ is the central theme of the entire creation. Biblically (in the reality of the Spirit and the Heart of the Father), the earth revolves around the sun, the solar system revolves around the nucleus of the galaxy, and the entire universe revolves around “The Lamb that was slain!” (Rev. 19:11; 5:9-13). When we get the Truth of His Magnificent Lordship incorporated into our individual lives, then the Gatherings and dealings of the Church, the glorious Bride of Christ, will be restored to Her rightful Inheritance.

There was a time, in the earliest days of this Heavenly Kingdom on earth, when the People of God tasted a little bit of what was and is meant to be. They simply experienced the power of the normal, everyday (and **ONLY**) Life of God’s Kingdom of Priests! And then, in just a few decades after Pentecost... the leaven of compromise and hypocrisy was tolerated—instead of wept over and removed, as God commands (1Cor.5:1-13; Luke 14:33). The resulting fall from God’s Intention has been tragic. But is there hope? You bet.

It’s coming! Watch! Fall on your knees (that would not be overly dramatic in the least). Gone will be the days of “I have my rights,” “servanthood and forgiveness are not my gifts,” “you just don’t understand my situation,” “my God is bigger than that—He’s a God of Lovvvve,” “I’m sure it doesn’t really mean that in the Greek” and.... Instead, we’ll be a people that are “a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27). We’ll be a people who aren’t gathering to be **INFORMED** or **ENTERTAINED**, but **EQUIPPED** for the **BATTLE** with the ugly snake, satan. The message won’t be some philosophy of living, or some behavior modification or accumulation of knowledge.

Rather, we're becoming by His Grace and Might a "dwelling place for the Living God" by plugging into the power Source that raised Jesus Christ from the dead! (Eph. 2:22; 1:19-20). God is now raising up a People with ever-deepening relationships (though growing by trial!) where we are confessing sins to one another, bearing burdens, being slaves of one another, and sharing great victories over trial and sin—ultimately over death itself. Praise our God! Christ will build on that foundation. The gates of hell itself will not be able to withstand that onslaught! (James 5:16; Gal.6:1-2; Eph.5:21; Heb.10:24; Gal.5:13; 1Cor.12:26; 15:54-57; Mt.16:18).

Here is my humble observation. In the past we have had the misconception that our relationship to the Father could be based on:

- Baptism (without ever really meeting a living Jesus and repenting),
- Knowledge of the Bible,
- Number of hours of "quiet time,"
- Number of Bible studies taught,
- How many times we've "waited on the Lord's table,"
- Whether we belong to the "right church,"
- etc.

Are these important? You must know that they are hollow and devoid of power without a life surrendered to the Master "heart, soul, mind and strength."

I can't count the number of times I've heard the defense "Well, I've been in the 'Lord's Church' 20 years now!" Let me respond with the words of John the Baptist: "God can raise up a 'member of the church' out of a rock! You produce fruit in keeping with repentance!" (Luke 3:7-9; Acts 26:20; Luke 6:43; Mat.21:43; 23:37-38).

Brothers and Sisters, how deeply it grieves God to see His people wandering in the wilderness, fussing and fuming and trying desperately to justify mediocrity. The facts are that "by their fruit you will know them." The Father is calling out to the groaning creation, "What more could I have done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?" (Luke 6:44; Is. 5:1-7).

This is an absolute. In many ways it pinpoints the source of the problem: "If a man abides in Me, and I abide in him, he will bear MUCH fruit" (John 15:5). The diagnosis is clear, no matter what else we may postulate—we're not doing much abiding in Him. Just religion, for the most part. And like the Israelites who wandered the wilderness for so long, we may begin to

believe that there is no Promised Land. Maybe God just wants us to hang in there and do good deeds and try to be basically moral. And "go to church," of course. God's not looking for much else, other than some steeples, some Bible knowledge and "faithful attendance." We can all simply pretend that Luke's record of the Church's experience of God's presence in the Book of Acts is a fairy tale. Or, at least we can invent a first-century-only "theology." We'll just say that our God reserved all that Power and Love in His Heart for the expression of His Son (the Church) for one generation only.

If you have noticed the importance of this matter, you've done well. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of **power**" (1Cor.4:20). Anything else is not His Kingdom at all. It seems that we have rationalized away the verifiable presence of God without Biblical substantiation. In other words, we've made what we've seen and experienced to be the norm, even the ceiling, of God's activity amongst men. We have tried (in a rather unconvincing way) to establish a theology that says "God isn't really involved anymore—He's just wound us up and sent us off to fight it out." I can't buy that anymore, though at one time I did. No more can I speak or bear to hear of a "theology" that is simply an excuse to justify our powerlessness. The real explanation of the poverty of the past generations is far more related to our sin than to which century we happened to be born in.

God took good care of His people while they wandered the wilderness—He fed them and kept them clothed...but they never saw the Promised Land. They lived, and died, outside of the victorious Will of God for their lives.

Brothers and Sisters, our 40 years are up—it's time to rise up and claim all that God has for us! Together, let's begin to purge, "to uproot, tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant"—in that order (Jer. 1:10). If we refuse to "Remember the height from which we have fallen, and repent and do the things we did at first," Christ will "remove our Lampstand." We'll go on meeting and singing and praying—but Christ won't be here, and we won't truly be called a "Church" from Heaven's perspective anymore (Rev.1:12, 20; 2:1, 5). Even though there may well be saved folks in this religious organization that meets in a building on Sundays and Wednesdays, we'll be a religious do-gooders club only (Rev. 2:4-5). That's not what Jesus died to establish! His Kingdom is clearly and observably from Heaven!

There is no other kind of Christianity or Church than that which is saturated in "the Power of an Indestructible Life." This Power is that same "exceeding greatness of His Power to us who believe, according to the working of his mighty Power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him

from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” The same Divine Energy that rose the body of our Lord—cold and battered beyond recognition—to a glorious new and indestructible Life is that which now lives in us! (Col.1:27; Eph.5:18; Rom.8:9; 2Cor.1:20-22; John 7:37-40; Eph.4:11-13). That’s no small matter! Do you suppose anyone in your family or at your workplace would notice such a thing if it were visibly true in you? You could more easily detonate an Atomic Bomb on a busy street without anyone noticing. No matter how cold and lifeless and battered you are, rejoice that our God specializes in such cases, to the praise of His Glory! Turn to Him, as a person, and tell Him your story. He loves you and longs for you to come to Him that He might show Himself mighty to deliver. Yet remember:

Though God has so much for us, He won’t build on sand. As the precious possession of the Living God, let’s immediately purge the leaven in our lives, and the church (immorality, materialism, job or thing or family worship, slander, drinking, deceit or divisiveness—2Thes. 3:6; Titus 3:10; 1Cor.5:11). If we shrink back, the leaven will destroy us. God has spoken—there will be no exceptions to God’s Word on the matter (1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal.6:7-10).

Here is one glimpse of the “Bride Prepared,” “Made Ready” (Rev. 19:7; 21:2; etc.):

“In the last days, the Mountain of the Lord’s Temple will be established as Chief among the mountains ... all nations will stream into it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord’” (Isa. 2:2-3).

Where is the “arm-twisting evangelism” in this verse? Did you know... you never have to advertise a fire! People just come.

Does all of this seem unlikely, or out of reach? Maybe. But we’re like Sarah. At age 90 she may not have been pregnant—but she was pregnant with promise! With the faith of Abraham, we praise God, and “without wavering” are “fully persuaded” that God is faithful to do what He promises. “Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?” (Rom.4:18-21; Heb.11:6; Isa.66:9). Let’s do our part and give our King, Jesus Christ, a Foundation of surrender and purity to build on!

PART III SO, WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

We can, and must, prayerfully and quietly start over in our hearts and personal priorities. Forget about starting an organized “church program” to “do God’s Will.” It won’t happen. Programs, as you surely have noticed, are unsustainable. “Ever-decreasing Glory.” Just be the Family of God for starters. Gather together continually (Acts 2:42-46). Not to hold “services”—no such concept exists in the Biblical Church. Just come together to share your lives with each other, to worship and compliment and praise the Father as He heals and instructs and chastens in your midst. Have fun together and grow in grace and knowledge of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Reach out to non-Christians in every place every time Jesus gives you a window of opportunity. Obey the Lord of Hosts in this and every “secret” place of your life and family. Don’t dare complain about others and say “We should do this or that.” Just get moving.

As for gatherings, when all God’s People gather in one place it is a time where “all things are done unto edifying” or “strengthening of the church” (1Cor. 14:26). The full church gatherings are for the BODY OF CHRIST, to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24-25) and to commune with our Risen Lord Jesus together. Our gatherings are (biblically) not to be a time of public spectacle as a few perform for the visitors and members. It was, and is meant to be, a time of deepening relationships and the God-directed impartation of His current Life and Word. Whether in someone’s living room or a football stadium, let it be without pomp or circumstance. In the First Century they met continually in a blend of public gatherings at a place like the city park in Jerusalem (“Temple Courts,” “Solomon’s Colonnade”) and smaller gatherings daily in homes (Acts 2:46, 4:31-34, 5:12; 20:20). What do you think would happen if a Body of Believers were all “seeking first the Kingdom” with “all their heart, soul, mind, and strength” “from the least to the greatest?” The greatest difference between then and now is not anything other than the self-centeredness of our priorities and fleshly appetites. But are you ready to go on? It’s worth it, for sure!

How might we actually begin to live out the “Purposes of God in our generation?” If you really want to pursue this, and are willing to pay the price of rejection and discomfort to do so, feel free to write to the address included in this booklet. Ask for “Meetings in His Kingdom,” “How to Be Joined to Jesus’ Church,” and “Traditions.” At some later point, if those prove valuable to you, ask for “Foundations and Patterns.” And write to someone in the church here, if you’d like, with any questions, problems, or heartaches you may have.

In the mean time, continue to catch a glimpse of what can be... for “without vision the people perish.” “Buy the Truth and sell it not.”

In God’s Church, there must be an accountability, an involvement with one another, an ongoing caring and encouragement as is the pattern and life-blood of the New Testament Church (Heb. 3:12-15; James 5:16, 20; Gal. 6:1-2).

Pliny the Younger was a Roman Philosopher & Governor at the turn of the first century. We have this gem of a quotation remaining from that era, maybe ten years or so after the death of the apostle John. Writing to the Emperor Trajan about some first and second generation Christians he had imprisoned, he said that as the followers of Jesus met, they would sing, and:

“bind themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wickedness—but on the contrary, to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery—also, never to violate their promise, nor to deny a pledge committed to them.”

As you can see, even in an era already marred by ritualism and compromise (Rev. 2, 3), the gathering of God’s People was not some rote routine to appease a far-away god. In addition to Worship of Jesus, gatherings clearly involved personal interaction and dealing with sin and difficulties on a very practical level. This was the nature of the church of the Bible as well. Even in this weak generation of the church, they weren’t just staring into a songbook, or at the back of someone’s head in the pew in front of them. Our time together is to be marked with a mutual exchange of life (Heb.10:24-25), not singing songs listed on a pre-printed menu and listening to a rehearsed oratorical masterpiece from a hired clergyman. Good intentions are better than bad intentions, but, according to Jesus, the traditions of men still make null and void the Word of God. Let’s not live that way anymore, OK? OK.

No doubt all of this is a little hard to grasp for those of us who were weaned on dressing up to “go to church” every Sunday. Though there is nothing even remotely similar to such a concept in the Bible, most of us have never known anything else. So, I’ll try to be a little more helpful here.

Let me share a little bit about the expression of Jesus’ Life on earth, the local church, that God has placed me in. We have discovered that the love that will bring the world to Christ, the love by which “all men will know” we are his disciples, is impossible to demonstrate in the lobby of a church building (John 13:34-35). Being “devoted to fellowship” means 7 days per week (Acts 2:42; Heb. 3:13). And as we gather, our purpose is not to just “teach”

but rather to “teach to obey” (Mt. 28:20). There is a wide gap between being “instructed intellectually” and being “trained” and “equipped for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:11-16).

If you read the Bible and consider the nature of Jesus’ Life with the Twelve and the Church that they birthed, you’ll discover that there is no Biblical basis whatsoever for the prevailing system of religious practice. It seems highly unlikely that the early Christians propped a sign in front of the cave where they met with “service” times and the “minister’s” name on it. A “song leader” surely did not stand in the front inside of that cave waving his arm. Can you really picture the “speaker of the hour” taking his position behind the rock in the front of the cave and spreading out his notecards? You know, I feel sure, that Paul did not stand out in the lobby of the cave (or house) shaking the parishioners’ hands after “services?” It simply was not like that. We can even laugh at ourselves a little. Even so, it is urgent that we discover what life in the church really was, and is, meant to be!

One church historian, Rufus M. Jones, says this: “The fellowship was an organism rather than an organization. The members had a common experience. They were fused. They were baptized into one Spirit. They ate a community meal, all partaking together of one loaf, and all together drinking of one cup... There was no rigid system. ‘Custom’ laid no heavy hand on anyone. Routine and sacred order had not yet come. There was a large scope for spontaneity and personal initiative. Persons and gifts counted for everything. Procedure was fluid and not yet standardized... The fellowship was more like a family group than like the church, as we call it. Everything was unique, and nothing repeatable. No leader dominated the group gatherings. The body met as a community of the Spirit; and, as Paul said, where the Spirit is, there is Liberty—not bondage or routine.”

Another recorder of church history, in commenting on the above excerpt, said: “The one single characteristic of apostolic worship and life was truly its spontaneity. The resurrected Christ was simply free to be Himself, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in His church! In His Body He freely moved and had His being—again in marked contrast to what we shall see develop in the ensuing centuries.”

Describing a week in a church where there is Life might help clarify things for you. I have also seen at times, though, that being ultra-specific has hindered God’s progress more than it has helped. This has happened as men have sought to carbon-copy Life by duplicating “stuff”—rather than turning to God, repenting of Idolatries in their lives, and begging God to be merciful to them and their city, for Jesus’ sake. Men birth Ishmael. God births Isaac.

Promise you won't run out and try to "have church" based on some new "good ideas" and I'll share some pictures of "normal life" with you. Deal?

In a Church that is birthed and living in Jesus, it is always "daily in public, and from house to house." Because we "live and move and have our being" in God's Kingdom and His Son, there is simply no other way we desire to live. Practically speaking, on some days in the community of God ("ekklesia," "church") most everything that is happening is personal outreach, or Kingdom time with family.¹ Some days are kind of quiet and not especially impressive to the naked eye, some gatherings meditative and calm. Many other days are much more corporate and dynamic. Our lives together are continually changing like different movements of a powerful, yet intricate symphony.

Pray as you read the following random journal of an eight day week in a simple and unadorned expression of God's Church. Think about these things. Hopefully, this sampling can serve to demonstrate how there is no need for gimmicks or programs on the calendar of a church fully committed to Him and His Kingdom...as there were no programs or gimmicks in the churches of the Bible, even with mega thousands of "members."

Monday. Early AM... Many of the saints are gathered at different homes to open up their lives to one another before they head off for work. What is it like? Some laughing; nearly half of the Hebrew letter is read in one of the homes; some passionate prayer for the souls of co-workers; and jubilant praise to Jesus everywhere. Nothing "goo-goo" or hyper-spiritual. Just some rock-solid gratitude to a Living King and terrific friend.

Noon time... Different brothers are together for lunch with each other and some unbelievers with whom they are sharing God's love. Back in the homes, various mothers of young ones are together praying, and encouraging and teaching one another in the challenges of their situations. Practical, challenging time. Some tears are shed, God is honored, and satan is hammered again as the Word of God is spoken into the difficulty. Courage is renewed by **Jesus'** Victory.

Late afternoon... Some disciples are out on a run and meet an unbeliever. He likes the idea of coming over for dinner.

¹ Of course, for those who are wondering as they read some of the above, if someone wants to take a night to be alone in prayer or to reach out to an unbeliever, they do that. Those who are together will surely pray for those who are about their Father's Business elsewhere. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." It is such a simple thing to live in Liberty when all are seeking first the Kingdom, rather than just "going to church."

Evening... Because all the Saints were "seeking first the Kingdom," what started out to be a barbecue with a couple of families and the hungry runner, is now 25 people who have found "where God's Action is" this evening. They're sitting in the hallway, up the stairway and into the kitchen as various ones share their hearts and pilgrimage with the newcomer. Prayer and worship are the natural product of the move of God this evening. Of course. "Religion" isn't something we do on some day of the week.² It isn't an emotional pacifier, or a nice little sprig of parsley on the big, important plate of life. Christ and His Kingdom are real. Jesus is now alive, and reigning as the head of a living body—provided we are not disconnected from Him. Consequently, tonight He has used a Priesthood of Believers to do His Will (as He will anytime His Headship is not denied by hierarchies, name tags, and pre-programmed liturgy). "And thus the secrets of his heart were revealed; and so, falling down on his face, the non-Christian worshipped God and reported that God was truly among us." And thank Him that He was!

Tuesday. Early AM... Again, especially after last night's cutting-edge time, a number of the Saints are together to seek God's Face. ("My Father's House shall be called a House of Prayer." Without being known for prayer, at least by the Father, it's not His House.) This morning, too, one of the women confessed that

² There are no "sacred" days in the Christianity of the Bible. Biblically speaking, the "Sabbath" did not move from Saturday to Sunday. Paul actually said he feared he had "wasted his time" on those who still considered one day more sacred than another. In another letter, he allowed for the fact that those with "weaker faith" might still have a holy day, rather than "every day alike," yet that is not God's intention. God spoke of CHRIST as the fulfillment of all special days. Live fully in CHRIST and you will not count one day as more sacred than another; you will not need "holy days" (Col.2:16-17, 20-23; Heb.4, 9:1-10, 10:1; Rom.14:1-5; Gal.3:10-11; etc.). The recorded Biblical history of the first sixty years of the Church of Jesus Christ never mentions holy "seasons" or holy "days" as "Christian"—the church of Christ Jesus and His Apostles did not continue to do such things as they learned to shed the Jewish "shadows" of the "reality that is in Christ." The Biblical record of the Church only even MENTIONS "the first day of the week," or Sunday, TWICE. In sixty years. Is it not true that a record of **sixty years** of the churches that most are a part of today would have far more than two references to Sunday? Remember, it must be an "orderly account" by a someone like a medical doctor of perhaps apostolic stature, a man such as Luke—the author of the original church record, the Book of Acts. "The Lord's Day" as Sunday, a special day to have a two hour "service," is a shortcut that has replaced the Reality of Christ's Church—we find such a church nowhere in the Scriptures.

For you history buffs, it seems that the concept of "the Lord's Day" as Sunday arose in Ephesus six decades after the Church was born (Christ in the Churches, Logos Tapes, Hazlet, NJ). Interestingly, the phrase "the Lord's Day" only occurs once in the entire New Testament (Rev.1:16), and likely has no reference to a special day of the week even in that instance. Such would be contrary to the very nature of Christianity—the celebration of Life and Reality that fulfill and enlarge the types and shadows of the "externals" in the Old Covenant. The phrase should likely be translated, as it is in every other case (in its Old Testament usage), in the possessive case as "the Day of the Lord"—rather than "the Lord's Day." The entire book of Revelation is, in fact, about "the Day of the Lord," not about "Sunday." What a difference! At least consider the fact that Jesus' Life was never centered around a two hour "service" while He was here, so why should it be now?!

she was not sharp in the use of her time at home. She earnestly desires some input and a lot of prayer that she might bring her heart joyfully into the Government of God and His Grace. Prayer. Tears. Laughter. Some really excellent time together to start the day.

Daytime... A couple of the men who work third shift have given up some sleep to go from house to house amongst the church and some neighbors doing odd jobs for them. Several non-Christian ladies are over for lunch. Down-to-earth, non-dramatic, God-centered life.

Evening... Two of the brothers have a strong desire to teach some of the older children some Truths about reverence for our Father and response to His Life and Love in a practical way. The nine of them all head off for a trail through the woods and “rise up, sit down, and walk along the Way” (Deut. 11). When they return, they discover that one of the men has called the whole church together to share some things that have been stirring in his heart. Some powerful teaching about “the full armor of God.” A brother from India who we met in Bombay is visiting with us. He has become a true man of God. He too shared his heart and experience about the weapons and armor of God. All are agreed that we should “declare a Holy Fast” in the church for tomorrow, and really pursue God’s application of these Truths to each of our individual lives. We have Bread that the world knows not of. (I hope that Bible verse is your experience, as well—to the extent that you could have written it, even if you had never read it?)

Wednesday. Early AM... Some on flex-time decide to call in to work and go in a little later this morning in order to join those that would be praying together. The walls, and satan’s dominion trembled this morning as we sang the song “The People of God” towards 7:30...

“We’re the People of God—called by His Name, called from the dark and delivered from shame. One Holy Race, saints everyone, because of the Blood of Christ, Jesus—the Son!”

Daylight hours... It seems quiet on the home front as most who are home have been apparently seeking out their Father’s Love and Word individually. A sister has met a married couple

at McDonald’s who are nomadic carnival workers. They’ve received showers and warm food, and I guess they will be with us for a while. Pray for them.

Evening... It started with fifteen or twenty showing up for one of the little guy’s Little League games, and then an excursion out for ice cream. The coach came with us, and was drawn up into some profitable conversation about his soul.

As some of the saints were together elsewhere, I understand that it was a frustrating time in some ways. The challenge from Heaven for each of us is to learn to take responsibility for that which God gives us, in gatherings and in our daily walk together. For many, the years of being a passive audience have taken their toll, and unlearning that dreadful religious habit (stained-glass spectacles) sometimes results in awkward meetings. The beauty of being a family, rather than an organization, is that we aren’t trying to put on a show. We can talk about stuff like this. In fact, we live to talk about (and draw each other up into) the practical realization of the highest ways of our Lord, Jesus.

Thursday. Early AM... I assume many were together this morning. I spent some time at home praying that God would work in everyone’s lives as they met, and as they live their lives for Him today.

Afternoon... Several of the mothers go to the park with their children and meet two ladies who live nearby. One is a Muslim. Jesus was exalted today, and the Seed of God will not be forgotten. The saints called a number of the others in God’s Family at work and at home. They asked that they pray for Rasili and Paula while they are at this critical time in the “Valley of Decision.” Tomorrow’s time with them should be revealing.

Evening... Believers gathered, as it happened, in several homes this evening. At one of the homes, a video teaching tape was stopped only twenty minutes into the teaching when a non-Christian had a puzzled look. As he opened up about his particular confusion, God again used the Royal Priesthood to speak His Word. One “had a psalm, another a word of instruction,” another a song. Another had a clear

word from Heaven that took everyone's breath away by its simplicity and convicting power. There was little else that could be said, and we all left quietly, knowing that God had visited His People. Prayerfully, the non-Christian won't be in that condition long.

Meanwhile, a few miles away, three brothers and a sister were sharing Christ and His Kingdom with a circle of urban tough guys. A "stray" gunshot nearby drew the attention of the police, resulting in the Saints being frisked alongside of the guys on the street. One of the brothers who wasn't feeling all that guilty got reprimanded for not jumping as quickly as some of the others: "Hey! You in the green shirt. Grab a piece of wall!" Possibly all of this will open some doors, in a backwards sort of way, with the "40th Street Gang." Drugs and violence can't really meet their needs. Our God, Creative as He is (and even with a sense of Humor sometimes), can help us reach them through an avenue that we could never have orchestrated.

Friday. Early AM... I messed up and didn't set my alarm correctly, so I can only say that I know that God's Army and His Truth were surely moving on this morning.

Daytime... It seems like several had the same idea today. Four different people have spent much of the day taking turns watching each other's children as the others read from the prophet Joel. We've all got much to share and so much to learn. But what fun!

Evening... A few of us men are spreading out to various homes to accumulate children in a few places. We'll teach them, love on them, and sing as it seems appropriate, no doubt. (And watch a video with some popcorn, if it seems right at the time! We'll see what happens.) We figure this will also free up the maximum number of parents to have a "Kingdom evening"—an evening where they can get into the homes or streets to do God's bidding.

Saturday. Car repair day today, I guess! The whole church has also enjoyed a cookout together, and some brothers and a few sisters have filled up three basketball courts at a nearby school. The B-ball time was pretty special as one of the guys asked a question about Revelation, Chapter 11 while we were choosing up

teams for game four. Forty-five minutes later the large circle of Believers sitting on the blacktop stood back up to continue the "bodily exercise." A good time for the non-Christians with us as well, though not what they had necessarily bargained for. The only singing most non-Christians are used to during a basketball game is the national anthem!

We didn't expect this as the day was coming to a close, but one of the brothers who was working that evening called a few dozen of us together at 8:30 PM after he got off work. He wanted to confess a trauma from his work place to which he had had a fairly poor response. As others heard of some gathering, more and more poured into the apartment. Calls were made to all ends of the city, everyone moved to the apartment complex clubhouse and grounds, and the children were cared for by those sensitive to see the needs and free up parents. The gathering climaxed sometime after midnight with a Celebration of the Lord's Goodness in breaking the Unleavened Loaf together. I suppose we already had been breaking the Bread of Life much earlier, in a sense. What a fitting finish to such a time. The songs that were on the hearts of God's Elect as different things happened amongst us this evening were enough in themselves to change every life in a four block radius. "I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Sunday. We had thought to get together for one of our famous taco salad lunches for the whole church. We did. Six hours later, there wasn't an untouched heart amongst us.

Monday. Early AM... As we gathered in the morning, for some reason only a handful were there. What a treat the others missed! And some say that God doesn't answer prayers about practical things like illness anymore. Tell that to Dave!

Afternoon... A couple of us spent time with a brother who had moved from another city to be with the church here. It seems that his chronic (though curable!) "stiff neck" is making him and his new roommates suffer needlessly. Maybe the "root" in his heart that is driving him is fear, or possibly ambition. Certainly selfishness. We'll work it out, though. He seems to desire God's Ways, and that's the best any of us have to offer. God help us all. What a challenge we face...to learn the Cross,

and yet not neglect His “applied” Righteousness, as we work Truth out together (Col.1:28; Heb.3:12-14; 1John 3:1-10). Regardless of the pain, of this we are certain: “I will build my Community, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!” Jesus will overcome...in, and through, His Church! God said so. (Eph.3:10, 20; 1Tim.3:15; Mat.16:18).

Evening... One of the brothers had called everyone together this evening. After a little while of trying to “force” things (of which we repented), we decided that Jesus doesn’t author boring gatherings (it was a real dud). It was recommended that we needed to go do something else with our evening. A fairly large contingent took off for a restaurant, some went to spend time with people they were reaching out to, and others went to be alone with their families. It was, in the end, a nice, peaceful “Kingdom night”—after the twenty-minute “meeting” was adjourned twenty minutes too late!

ad infinitum ...

Since this is only a snapshot of the flow of life in God’s Habitat for dynamic growth in His Kingdom, recognize that it can’t be duplicated or exported apart from the following:

- (1) Lives fully consecrated to God and His Purposes “from the least to the greatest” in the church. This needs to be true for every life that wears the Name of Jesus, not just a “committed nucleus” (1Cor.5:7-13; 2Tim.2:19; Titus 2:11-15; Acts 3:23; Luke 13:3, 14:33; Heb.8:11-12).
- (2) Proximity to, and/or deep church relationship with the “gifted,” born of Heaven men of God mentioned in Eph.4:7-16 (not simply men who are “learned,” committed, mature, or sincere). They must be doing (out of relationship, not office) the work that only they can do in the Church of Jesus, locally and extra-locally.
- (3) God Himself Authorizing, Validating, and Blessing the Work at that moment in History.

As the T.V. Chemist said, “Don’t try this experiment at home.” Apart from the factors just listed, this type of corporate life is unsustainable and will become contaminated, if not perverted. “Life-style idolatry” is as empty as any other form of idolatry. If you try to emulate the kind of life just

portrayed on good intentions and a little knowledge, you’ll end up with an erratic garage bible study, or man-made religious movement, at best. At worst you’ll meet, sooner or later, the fate of Uzzah, or Achan, or Zimri, or Korah, or Ananias, or Nadab and Abihu...for touching the Holy Things of God presumptuously.³ **God has a way!** Stay close to Him without running ambitiously ahead, prepare your life, pray to the Lord of the Harvest, and look up! It’s going to be awesome.

Thoughts

Before I conclude, let me just make some more observations that you can weigh against the Life and Spirit of the Substance of Christ and His Church that you read about in the Bible....

Although visitors will often be present during the time the Family of God is together (1Cor. 14:24) as seen above, the meeting is not for them, but for the Father and His Children. Are there evangelistic Bible Studies, or any other kind of Bible Studies in the church that Jesus began? Read the Biblical account of the nature of a Gathering. It will surprise you! If the visitors were to come during a time when God is Present in Reality (rather than in theory or conjured, preplanned, and manipulated hype) they really could “fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (1 Cor 14:25). When God is in our midst, “the power of the Lord Jesus is present” (1Cor. 5:4) and men will cry out “God is really among you.” If He is not present because we have written Him out of the script with unbiblical structure and unconfessed sin, our “meetings do more harm than good” (1Cor. 11:17).

At a meeting of the New Testament church in the first century (when the apostles that had walked with Jesus while He was still in the flesh were still alive), there certainly was no chance of a comment like “the ‘service’ went ten minutes over today...murmur, murmur.” How could it be?! Christ is our Sabbath—not a certain day or hour! (Heb.4:1-13; Col.2:16-17; Gal.4:10-11).

³ Obviously “two or three gathered together” in Jesus’ Name is a special time, and a fragrant offering to the Father. I’m not implying here that those that are not living in the middle of “daily in public and from house to house,” “no beauty or majesty” life in the Kingdom are instantly outside of God’s Will. This is addressed in more depth in some other tapes and booklets. Gathering with other Followers of Jesus is a wonderful thing. Really what I am dealing with is the frightful teaching of men that anyone can just “start a church.” I’m not suggesting that some are second class Christians, or that we shouldn’t gather with other Believers except under perfect circumstances. Far from that! I am saying that God’s glorious Vision is a People in every locale immersed in, together, as “One New Man” (rather than 50 or 50,000 individuals), the same Spirit and Character as their older brother and the Firstborn of their race, Jesus Christ. And this is not something that can be man-initiated or carbon-copied. A “Foundation,” a “Lampstand” in a city is a very Holy thing.

Certainly all meetings didn't last far beyond midnight (as in Acts 20), but it was a distinct possibility, unlike in the religious system of today where it wouldn't be possible.

Interestingly, in the Early Church there was no direct emphasis on "church growth." Read the tremendous volume of writings from the apostle Paul to the Believers that he was pouring his (and God's) heart out to. "Church Growth" is simply not on the apostle's mind. His fervor was for them to know Jesus, and to rid themselves of everything that would hinder that. The growth would be the product of being filled to overflowing with the New Wine, and staying in communion with the Head (John 15:5-8). Therefore, it is not simply semantics to say that it is not the Father's desire that we go into all the world to "build a great church for Jesus." "Unless the Lord builds the House, its builders build in vain."

As was said earlier, certainly God cares infinitely about "putting everything under Him" and "everything being subject to Him" and "bringing many sons to Glory" (Heb. 2:8-10). However, we are not (out of fear, guilt, religious ambition, or even sincerity) to grab Hagar, the Egyptian (world system) woman, to answer our own prayers at the time we feel we should "bear fruit." The seed of Ishmael, rather than Isaac, ultimately produces an environment that petrifies and is hostile to the Spirit (Gal.4:25-29). He never called us to use our marketing and motivational genius to conquer the world for Jesus.

"The LORD added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47) "God gives the increase" (1Cor. 3:6). "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

Our job is not to find a system or a program that will crank out disciples if done correctly. Find me a system that can baptize 3,000 people in one day after a sermon by an unpolished fisherman. If our "success" is dependent directly on the number of props we have in place, what makes us think that God is part of it?

In a nutshell? Our part is to be faithful vessels of God's love (2 Cor 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:21). We certainly are to be diligent and obedient to the command to "go make disciples." That is definitely not a passive command. Our fervent desire, like Paul's, is that "our area of activity greatly expand, so that we can preach the Gospel in regions beyond" (2Cor. 10:15-16). Remember though, "Christ will build His church" and "God gives the increase." But not to an unfaithful sin-infested people. Our job is to "love the Lord our God with

heart, soul, mind and strength," love each other as much as we love ourselves, be involved in each other's spiritual growth (Eph. 4:16; Heb. 3:12-15), and sacrificially serve and witness to others (Rev. 12:11). We must be a "Bride prepared, beautifully dressed for her Husband," "a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, holy and blameless" (Rev. 18:7; 21:2; Eph. 5:27). If God can trust us with increase because of our holiness and prayerfulness and dedication to Him, He will give the increase (Jn.15:5; Phil. 1:22). Rest assured, God wants it far more than we do! We need to be pure vessels and simply a "means of transportation" for the living, reigning Christ (Col. 1:27). Then (and only then) will we "fill the city with our teaching" and "turn the world upside down" (Acts 5:28; 17:6). And I speak of God's unmistakable intervention, not men's "new and improved methodology" (based on a Bible verse or two to give it credibility).

God won't build on the sand—we must be a pure and holy Body that God's Life might flow through us to do His work. Although we can build a tower of Babel (Gen. 11), a growing "church," as a monument to ourselves (in the name of Christianity) without God's help, it won't be worth having.

In practicality, life in the church was not "Sunday" oriented at all. Amazingly, in the 60 years that the New Testament covers (in the Book of Acts, and the letters of Paul, Peter, and others) the words "Sunday," or "First Day of the Week" are only even mentioned twice! What are the odds of Sunday only being mentioned twice if the history of today's version of church was carefully and honestly recorded for 60 years? You see what I mean. "Bring your Neighbor Day" would seem out of place in light of anything we see in the Apostolic Church. The "outreach" and life of the church were throughout the week in the marketplace and in the homes. Some of the "evangelism" was done in the religious temples of the local denominations on Saturday (the synagogues). Men and women in every context of life proclaimed Jesus with "no holds barred." If it's His Living Word (rather than just regurgitation of Hebrew and Greek poetry from our heads) emanating from a life "full of the Holy Ghost" it will not return void. It will "penetrate even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Everyone with a good heart will "come into the light" that "his deeds will be exposed" (Jn. 3:20)—and be shown a God "rich in kindness, tolerance and patience" that will "lead them towards repentance" (Rom. 2:4). The trumpet will "sound a certain call" as the "very oracles of God" (Acts 17:19; Acts 13:42-43; Mt.7:28-29; 1Cor.14:8; 1 Peter 4:11).

This is the "real McCoy," not "Fantasy Island." It has changed our lives immeasurably. Find out what Acts 2:42-47; Luke 6:20-36; Luke 14:12-14 and other unknown passages are all about (passage unknown at least to the life of most of twentieth century religion). As our Lord said: "Go and find the

meaning of this” (Mt. 9:13). You can spend your life dabbling with religion, or “fulfilling the Purposes of God in your generation.” You can put yourself in an environment where your most adventurous move would be to poke your hand up during a “Bible Class” and say something “daring” (and probably be ridiculed). Or you can live where you can seek first the Kingdom and His visible Reign amongst His People. You can, if it is worth everything to you, pursue the “Habitat” of God’s Love and Power and Relationship amongst His Holy Nation. You can pursue a life in the church that will maximize the opportunity for Meteoric, rather than Mediocre growth for you and your family. A corporate Life characterized, by Jesus’ own Word, as a “Bride PREPARED for the return of the Groom.” “A glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.” An equal yoke for Jesus—compassionate, yet filled with fury towards hypocrisy; sensitive, yet relentlessly pursuing the completion of Her Father’s business. She’ll be a church that is not bound by time and place, but “daily in public and from house to house.” She’ll be “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament,” “everyone members of one-another,” “confessing sins one to another,” “admonishing one another daily so that none are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,” always loving and serving and “bearing one-another’s burdens.” This is the Church that Jesus purchased with His own Blood and is filled with His Spirit. Will you pursue her, as Jesus does? It is time now to die to the appetites and idolatries and busyness of the flesh that hinder our Lord from expressing Himself fully again. Life is too short to “not, and say we did.” Amen?

Part IV

“Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw.

(2Kings 6:17; Col.1:9-11; Eph.1:17-21)

“In the beginning, God had a dream. Creating us in His image, He not only anticipated fellowship with us, but desired that we recreate something of what Heaven was like on earth. He designed us to discover ourselves by first discovering Him and through communion with Him model together what we learned of His character. That we sit here in the Twentieth Century on the edge of chaos is a tragic commentary on the depth of our decline.

“Yet God has always been at work preparing a people; a people who, by His grace and power, would arise to their destiny and fulfill His desire; a people who would allow His Kingdom to be expressed through them on

earth as it is in Heaven. Yet so many times through blatant unfaithfulness or simply allowing the hum-drum of life dull their sensitivity, His people have fallen short of this high calling.

“It is recovering this sense of destiny that the present yearning for revival is all about. For it is not just seasons of refreshing that we need, but a restoration of the Church. What kind of Church is Christ returning for—a divided Body or a spotless Bride? If we truly long for His coming, we’ll be prepared as His people.”⁴

How highly do you esteem God? Your passion for the tangible, meaningful reality of God’s Work all around you in your lifetime...is in direct proportion to your estimate of God Himself. Our God is preparing something (John 14:2-3, 15-23). Our Glorious Father is building something (Heb.3:1-4; Psalms 102:16, 118:22, 127:1; Mat.16:18; 1Cor.3:9-16; Eph.2:19-22; 1Pet.2:4-8; 2Cor.3:17-18; Isa.9:6-7; Zec.4:1-6:15; Gen.2:21-22). And He is building something that is made of His Son Jesus, worthy of His Abiding Presence for all Eternity. It is being formed at this very moment. He is enlisting men and women with the vision, courage, and a willingness to pay the price of bringing to a conclusion the Ancient Task. As weak and foolish as we are, that’s what we must be pursuing, with all of our hearts.

Together, as we press into an “ever-increasing government,” our prayer is for courage, singlemindedness, and ruthless clarity in our understanding of the scriptures and the Heart of God.

Pray that we’ll never worship the Bride, but rather the Bridegroom.

Pray that this world will know that Christ Reigns as we together “Blow the trumpet in Zion and sound the alarm” and “give the people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun has come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace” (Hosea 2:1; Luke 1:77-79).

Grace and Peace.



1985, 1989

⁴ Steve Fry, “Thy Kingdom Come,” Sparrow