

# **SOUL RAPE**

**Why People Hate Going to Church, Distrust  
Clergy, Avoid Religion, Keep Searching for  
God, and the Revolution They Started**

**Shean A. Smith**

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by

Shean A. Smith

LivingPress.org

Gulf Shores, Alabama, U.S.A.



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## Preface

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**M**ost of my life has been centered on the Church. I gave ten percent of my income to Church, attended Church faithfully, prayed, read the Bible, gave the gospel message to others, served my local Church, and did everything I could to keep God happy with me so he would bless me. I had even come from a family of Clergy. I discovered, though, that when I failed to do any of the things I believed I had to do to be a good Christian, I felt guilty and ashamed.

Jesus said in John 8:31-32 “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” ([NLT]). If I remained faithful to what I thought were Jesus’ teachings, why did I feel guilty when I failed to do everything that was expected of me? If I were free, why was I feeling guilty at all?

I began to examine myself and the Church to see why I felt this way. I wanted to know what place guilt had with freedom and why I had to do religious things to keep from feeling guilty. Being free while feeling guilty was a paradox and made no sense to me, so I asked God to help me, to show me his teachings, and to set me free truly. God began to teach me about his freedom as I wrote my first book, *Free Indeed?*

From there, God began to show me why I had suffered from guilt and shame. These feelings came because I failed to meet the “spiritual” expectations of my family and religion. God began to show me how religion is designed by men to dominate the lives of

its members. As God taught me, I dug out Christian history books and began to examine this whole concept of what I had grown up knowing as the Church and what it actually has to do with Christ and being his child.

I knew that if I had such questions, then surely others must have them as well. There did not seem to be any books focusing on how and why the Church does what it does and why the Church seems to have a hold on people the way it does. It also seemed timely that a book be written to help people understand why there is an ever-growing move away from the bricks and mortar of the Church. There is a revolution afoot, and I wanted to know why. This book contains my discoveries about why there is and has always been a silent revolution of people who resist the Church.

The scope of the research for this book is quite simple. I used my experiences with the Church, looked at its history and then compared it with the Scriptures. I also bypassed the typical English translations of the Scriptures and did Greek word studies as to the meanings of mistranslated words. There had to be a reason that scriptural words were mistranslated. I also studied psychological sources to find out why people feel guilt when they do not measure up to religious expectations. For your convenience, I have included footnotes and a bibliography.

The purpose of this book is to give readers a view into questions they may have had about why the Church can be a place that people avoid. I am not intending to offend anyone with this book, nor do I want to offend anyone who truly loves Christ and is involved in the Church. I am merely sharing my discoveries about why the Church has a hold on people and why many people despise it.

## 1—Violated

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**I**t was nearly midnight as the young bride waited at the train station to meet her groom. She was as pure as the snowflakes that fell and caught in her hair, her dress so white that it was hard to tell where it ended and the snow began. The lamp she held made her cheeks glow, and every flicker of the flame made her eyes sparkle like a fireworks display on the Fourth of July.

Her groom had told her to be ready to be united when he got to the train station, but he did not give an exact time when that would be. Finally, a train chugged down the tracks and came to a screeching halt. Off jumped a man dressed in fine clothes with a professional look about him. His eyes and stature boasted of trustworthiness.

He approached the young bride, held out his hands to her and drew her close for a warm embrace. He introduced himself as her groom's representative and produced from his vest pocket a note saying that her groom would be a little delayed. After reading it to her, the representative added that he had been instructed by the groom to look out for her. He was to take her into his home and provide for all of her needs until the groom arrived.

Innocently, the bride followed him and willingly went with him to his house; little did she know what was waiting for her. As soon as the bride entered this man's domain, he locked the door, put handcuffs on her wrists, and began to violate her. He said that it was for her good, and that what he was doing was preparing her for her groom.

For the past 1,900 years, the Church (what we typically know of as the Church) has perpetuated soul rape on its members. Christ's free bride is continually violated by religion. In the above story, the bride represents the community of believers—what the Bible calls the bride of Christ—the groom represents Christ, the professional man and his house represent the Clergy and the Church (institution) respectively, the note he read to the bride represents the Bible, the handcuffs represent religion, and the violation represents what the Church has been doing for a long time to people's consciences.

For the remainder of this book, I will use the capitalized *Church* to reference the Clergy-officiated, physical institution. When I use lower case *church*, I will be referring to the family of God, which has been reunited with him through Christ. Through the course of this book I will show why I am differentiating between them.

This book looks at the subtlety of the Church's violation of believers' consciences over the centuries that began as an "innocent" attempt to prevent heresy. This book will also show that being in God's family is simple and nothing is required to get and keep God's favor. Before I can delve into our freedom from religion and our enjoyment of a free and effortless father-child relationship with God, I must remove the religious veil of spiritual bondage that masks itself as freedom in Christ.

## **Religious Violation**

For many years, religion has been violating the soul of Christ's bride—so cunningly that the bride has been made to feel the guilt of being in the wrong. Many people have felt for a while that something was just not right about the Church, but they were not quite

sure what. This book uncovers the methods the Church uses to manipulate people into following its agenda. Roger Williams, the seventeenth-century proponent of religious freedom, was one of the first Americans to accuse the Church of spiritual rape. Williams' writings were the probable catalyst for America's First Amendment (freedom of religion).

In his brave stand before the monarchical and state run Church, Roger Williams wrote and submitted *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution* to the English Parliament, for which Parliament wanted to burn him and his book. This is a portion of what Williams wrote when he addressed the Church-government, which forced people to obey its religious laws:

Whatever way of worshipping God your own consciences are persuaded to walk in, yet, from any bloody act of violence to the conscience of others, it may never be told at Rome nor Oxford, that the parliament of England hath committed a greater rape than if they had forced or ravished the bodies of all the women in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Williams wrote and taught that every person's conscience ought not to be "violated or forced."<sup>2</sup> He wrote that the Church and religions that made people conform to their doctrines through persecution, manipulation, guilt, and shame were ...

so directly contradicting the spirit, and mind, and practice of the Prince of peace; so deeply guilty of the blood of souls, compelled and *forced to hypocrisy in a spiritual and soul-rape* (emphasis added); so deeply guilty of the blood of the souls under the altar, persecuted in all ages for the cause of conscience, and so destruc-

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1 Roger Williams, *Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed: and Mr. Cotton's Letter Examined and Answered*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: J. Haddon, 1848), 6.

2 Williams, 152.

tive to the civil peace and welfare of all kingdoms, countries, and commonwealths.<sup>3</sup>

Williams adamantly protected the sanctity of the individual human conscience. Unfortunately, there is a continual battle for the human conscience, primarily in the confines of the Church in America and beyond.

The Church is guilty of abusing consciences over the centuries. Many people are thirsty to know their Creator; the Church uses this thirst to lead people into the dry levy of institutionalism.

### **Widespread Violation**

The Church perpetually commits spiritual violation worldwide—its intent is to replicate itself by the most efficient ways possible. The four walls of the Church contain all of the necessary elements to ensure control over all who enter its doors and become part of its membership. Every part of the Church's weekly services is geared to harvest responses from the audience. The Church's existence depends on the effectiveness of its programs, politics, policies, and procedures, which have been developed and carefully honed for maximum effectiveness over the last 1,900 years. Just because something has been around for nearly two millennia does not mean it is holy and godly.

Many want to understand what is going on behind the scenes of the Church and why it does what it does. You may not be a victim of the Church's manipulation through guilt and shame; you may choose to be there and feel free to participate and come and go as you please—Godspeed to you. However, in this book I am addressing why people are becoming so discontented and disillu-

3 Williams, 187

sioned with the brick and mortar of the Church; I found that the reason hinges on the nature of the Church as we know it.

The success of the Church centers on pragmatism—the end justifies the means. Pragmatism preaches that God is in the details of the Church—its liturgy, programs, and policies—and ministers are taught that when a Church fails, it is because its leaders did not handle these details properly. Many Church leaders have given up their professions because they have felt like failures. When Church leaders have successful Churches, they are extolled as God-loving, honoring men and women who are sold out to God.

I understand that most of the Clergy are motivated by a true love for Christ. These people have given their lives to serve God in the Church, yet it drives many of them out of serving it because it uses them up and burns them out. There has to be a deeper reason that many of the men and women who serve the Church burn out and reject being professional ministers. Are they, too, being violated by the expectations of the Church?

The Church has reasons for doing what it does. Every element—from the pastor to outreach—has a methodology behind it that aims to have power over people and their thought processes. Such harmless sounding words as *encourage* and *exhort* are used as euphemisms in the process of thought reform. Religion, particularly the Church, was designed to manipulate and control the activities of its members and its leaders through guilt and shame. If any Church can affect one's conscience and decision-making process, it will, because it is seeking results. Another name for this is propaganda, or a more familiar word—advertisement.

## God's Protection Against Spiritual Violation

How does the Bible view a person's conscience? People who are not Christians might be surprised. The Bible views an individual's conscience as an intimate and private matter between an individual and God. The Bible says that any act taken to make another person go against his conscience is a sin against that person and Christ (1 Cor. 8:9, 12). God is the only judge of what is right and wrong: Paul, an apostle of Christ, wrote, "My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide" (1 Cor. 4:4 [NLT]).

The Bible clearly portrays the conscience of a person to be of utmost importance. The Bible even protects individuals from the attempts of others who will use any means to influence their consciences; in other words, it is God's job alone to affect consciences without human intervention. Paul wrote, "Why should my freedom be limited by what someone else thinks?" (1 Cor. 10:29b [NLT]). The attempt by any person, government, or religious entity to supplant God by trying to influence the emotions and thoughts of people through any kind external force is nothing short of spiritual violation.<sup>4</sup>

## Concluding Remarks: Victimized

Predators are stealthy in the way they approach their prey: they wait until the victim is unaware of what is about to happen, and when the moment is right, the predator springs to action to do his violence to the innocent victim. This is why Peter wrote that we must always be aware of what is going on spiritually around us:

<sup>4</sup> See Romans 14 to further show God's special protection of each believer's conscience.

“Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8 [NLT]). Religion is a favorite tool of the devil as it easily consumes the freedom of people.

I will prove that the Church from its pulpits violate Christ’s bride. The Church preaches love, hope, and freedom but then piles on rules and routines to maintain certain standards. When the rules and routines of institutionalism are not obeyed, the Church makes its members feel guilty and shameful as if they are breaking God’s commands.<sup>5</sup> America was founded on the principle of a free conscience, but as we see in our religious society today, a free conscience can only be found outside of religion’s walls.

Here are examples of some phrases the Church uses that violate its members: “If you vote Democratic, you cannot be a Christian since the Democratic Party supports abortion. If you do not tithe or financially support this church or that project, you are robbing God. If you do not support the Church’s missions programs and projects, you cannot possibly love God and your fellow man.” These are just a few of the Church’s uses of external forces to affect consciences in its favor.

The Church preaches that only God is the judge of our consciences, but it continues to violate the consciences of individuals with guilt and shame. Religion is based on guilt and shame. It has violated people’s consciences in many ways throughout the history of the Church and does so today. Soul rape began when the position of Clergy was born, creating the Church that would build a wall of protection around the Clergy. The position of Clergy and its

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<sup>5</sup> Churchianity is the religion of the Church; denominations or individual Churches decide what doctrines they want to adhere to.

Church would begin manipulating Scripture to form the religious paradigm we understand as the Church today.

Through time, the Church created religious doctrines and traditions founded upon the clerical positions. It is through these doctrines and beliefs that the Church maintains control over the consciences of its members. It has taken many years, but the way the Church controls the consciences of its members is through its misuse of the Bible, through Church attendance, proselytizing, money, and more. This book peels back the layers of fiction that have been covering the pages of truth to show you walls that enslave and protects the violators.

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## 2—From Emissary to Adversary

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The senator seemed kind and caring. His loyalty appeared to be to his home planet, his queen, and her safety. He seemed to love and care for them first and then the republic. He stated with pride that he was for freedom from tyranny and would do all that was necessary to maintain that freedom. Soon, this senator became the chancellor of the republic when the former one was voted down due to his *seeming* inability to preserve order between warring factions.

During his early tenure, the new chancellor had to deal with a costly and devastating rebellion as well as threats of secession. To quell this tide of violent unrest in the republic, the chancellor requested and received *total* but *temporary* emergency powers so that he would have the ability to bring peace and restore order to the galaxy. The first thing the chancellor did was to create an army to combat troublemakers and repulse any attempt to secede from the republic.

After the chancellor created the republic's army, he positioned them all across the galaxy to maintain order. After attempts on his life by the apparent enemies of the republic had failed, he changed the status of the galaxy from a family of planets to a galactic empire with himself as the sole leader. He promised to maintain peace throughout the new empire. Before long, the emperor used his power to disband the very senate he had promised to give his emergency powers back to. After it was too late, the emperor's subjects realized that he was the one responsible for all the events that had

put him into power, and that the army he had created kept him in power. This story is all too familiar in Church history.<sup>1</sup>

### **Christ's Emissaries**

An emissary is a representative, envoy, ambassador, messenger, or agent, sent from a higher authority.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Christ sent his emissaries, commonly known as apostles, into the world to make more disciples.

Christ's emissaries had no authority to lord it over his other disciples; they were sent under Christ's authority to carry the good news to the world. For instance, an American ambassador carries out the diplomatic missions and policies of his boss—the President of the United States of America. The ambassador does not convey his own feelings and wishes but those of the one who sent him.

Christ's emissaries were his ambassadors; they carried out his commands without inserting their opinions and their own spin on their Master's commands. Jesus did not command his emissaries to create organizations and hierarchical ecclesiastical governments; Jesus wanted people to love, be free, and serve each other. Have you ever known the Clergy, especially a senior pastor, who has acted as your servant and slave every day? Jesus' words on the subject of leadership were as follows:

But Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and the men of high position exercise power over them. It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave;

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1 This story comes straight from George Lucas' *Star Wars* series, and is primarily based on *Star Wars* Episodes 1 through 3.

2 Microsoft Word, 2007 thesaurus.

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:25-28 [HCSB])

Christ’s standard of servant leadership is too high for one leader of a Church to meet. I believe this is why there are so many ex-pastors and ex-ministers. I want to reaffirm the fact that I know that most people who are Clergy love Christ very much. They do what they do with a heart of service to him and humanity. Consequently, throughout this book, I refer only to the position of Clergy and not to them personally.

### **The Position of Clergy Is Born**

The following is 1 Peter 5:1-7 in the New International Version:

**1** To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **2** Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; **3** not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. **5** Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” **6** Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. **7** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:1-7 (NIV)

The King James Version renders 1 Peter 5:3 like this: “Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”<sup>3</sup> In its context, Peter is speaking to the elders. When Peter,

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<sup>3</sup> I am sure that when King James’ people translated this verse, they did so with the understanding that God’s heritage was the Clergy. The translators

Paul, and the rest of the apostles address the elders of the community, they are not signifying a position, but old age—with age comes the experience that enables these people to be examples (1 Pet. 5:1-4). The apostles expected the older believers to be examples in the way they loved others. None of the apostles ever wanted the older believers to take advantage of their age, experience, and knowledge.

The English word *clergy* comes from the Greek word *klēros*, which is used in 1 Peter 5:3.<sup>4</sup> Peter uses the word *klēros* to refer to ALL of God's people; *klēros* means *allotment*, which may be better understood as *heritage*.<sup>5</sup> God's people are his heritage. A heritage in this sense "is something somebody is born to; the status, conditions, or character acquired by being born into a particular family or social class."<sup>6</sup> God's heritage does not belong to a human leader but to God. As the Lord's heritage, we are under the direct guidance of the Lord. The true clergy, then, are all of God's children, not those holding degrees or titles. The true clergy are normal everyday believers who work for an honest living and live to love God and their neighbors.

Applying the true meaning of *clergy* to the unmodified English translation from the Greek, 1 Peter 5:3 says, "but not as mastering over the *klēros* [clergy] but examples becoming of the flock" (em-

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of the KJV were Anglican and were under the control of King James. The Anglican Church is presided over by the English monarchy. The Anglican translators would have translated the Bible according to their priestly paradigm.

4 W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr. "Baptism, Baptist, Baptize," *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 381.

5 Vine, 381. The use of *heritage* here is referring to God's legacy/birthright. As God's birthright, believers have the right to be called his children from the moment of birth into his family.

6 Microsoft Encarta Dictionary (2007), s.v. "Heritage."

phasis and translation added).<sup>7</sup> The whole context of this passage is referring to how the old men should treat the Lord's *ekklesia*, the called-out, God's heritage.

After the apostles all died off, it became quite easy for people to derive the meaning they desired from 1 Peter 5:3. In this passage, Peter uses both of the terms *clergy* and *flock* to refer to all of God's family. Ulterior motives would separate the *flock* (the laity) from God's *heritage* (the designation the Clergy took for themselves). Although God's heritage is his family, as I have previously mentioned, traditional translations generally render *heritage* as "those under your charge." If taken out of the context of 1 Peter, "those under your charge" can and does take on a whole new meaning. A better translation of "those under your charge" would be "those entrusted to you."

In the context of 1 Peter 5:1-7, "those entrusted to you" can't mean that God's flock belongs to the elders since God's flock belongs to God. If "elder" is not a position then how are elders best understood? Elders are older brothers and sisters who look out after their younger siblings. E.g., My oldest son looks out after my two younger sons while my wife and I go out for a date or to take care of some business. When my wife and I leave for a date we entrust the other two sons to the eldest's care until we return. My oldest son knows what to do in an emergency; he knows how to fix a meal and knows to call other family members or 911 in case of an emergency. 1 Peter 5:1-4 was addressed to the elders (old people) and reminded them not to take advantage of their age and treat the younger believers as their lackeys. One of the instructions my wife and I give to our oldest son is not to take advantage of his age

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7 McReynolds, 846.

while we're gone. Sometimes older siblings have the "I'm in charge" mentality and bully their younger siblings because of their age. As the children become adults, they are able to care for themselves without a sibling babysitting them.

In the paradigm of the Clergy, however, they take the word *elder* and turn it into an office that governs the poor helpless sheep. This clerical office does not allow for grown believers to move beyond a position-controlled environment to enjoy a person-to-person relationship with God. As long as there is Clergy, believers will depend upon those "in authority" to guide them instead of God's Spirit. Only in the Church do grown-up believers in Christ require babysitters.

We are God's flock, not the elders' flock. See the kind of care elders give in 2 Cor. 1:24: "We're not in charge of how you live out the faith, looking over your shoulders, suspiciously critical. We're partners, working alongside you, joyfully expectant. I know that you stand by your own faith, not by ours." In 2 Corinthians 1:24 (MSG) Paul further elaborates the kind of care the elder apostles, especially Peter, gave the younger believers. Below is the kind of tender loving care elder believers give because God lives in them.

**6** Even though we had some standing as Christ's apostles, we never threw our weight around or tried to come across as important, with you or anyone else. **7** We weren't aloof with you. We took you just as you were. We were never patronizing, never condescending, but we cared for you the way a mother cares for her children. **8** We loved you dearly. Not content to just pass on the Message, we wanted to give you our hearts. And we did. 1 Thessalonians 2:6-8 (MSG)

Loving care cannot be generated by a position; it comes because of the change that takes place in a person as he or she gets older and as they walk with God.

During Bible times, old people were deeply respected because of their age. Getting old and grey in the ancient world was quite an accomplishment, given people's workload and lack of medical knowledge. Being old and grey was a grand thing and commanded respect.

In Bible days younger people were expected to hold the aged in high regard. In Jewish society, the aged were the ones to exercise the wealth of their experience and authority in the communities. The aged ensured the laws of the community were obeyed.

In contrast to the Jewish elders who controlled the community, the older people of God's kingdom were to take care of God's heritage as a grandparent does a grandchild—we all know grandparents spoil their grandchildren! My children always come home more rotten than they were when they went to see their grandparents. Grandparents lavish love on their grandchildren. The problem comes is verse 3 of 1 Peter 5:1-7. Clergy use verse 3 to insist that God gave them the sheep until he returns to gather everybody together. 1 Peter 5:1-7 focuses on loving God's heritage like a grandfather would his grandchildren.

The people known as the Church Fathers intentionally founded the Clergy, so the Clergy's subsequent offices (pastor, elder, deacon) were products of the official paradigm those religious patriarchs created. Today, even in evangelical Churches, the teachings of these patriarchs are the means by which we understand the Bible. However, the writings of those known as the Church Fathers have

no spiritual authority over our lives today, nor did they ever have any spiritual authority over the lives of any believer in Christ.

The laity want clear consciences, so they place themselves under the authority of the Clergy, who claim to give spiritual answers at the Church's weekly meetings. The Clergy need numerical success to estimate their effectiveness, so they take advantage of people's desire for a clear conscience. This is a maneuver developed over hundreds of years by the Clergy to gain and keep control over the Clergy-dependent laity.

The Clergy have been manipulating Scripture since the apostles died, and it is clear that most, if not all, Bible translations reflect a Clergy bias. The meanings in the original Greek and Hebrew texts can be quite different from what one reads in many English Bible translations because if they reflected the true intent of the authors regarding Scriptures about leadership, then the Clergy would not have an office from which to officiate.

### **The Takeover Begins With Emergency Powers**

So when did the Clergy take over God's heritage? It began after the apostles died. The earliest proof of the takeover by the clergy comes from some letters of post-apostolic writings of the *very* early Second Century. It is my opinion, however, that the takeover began soon after the destruction of Jerusalem happened, probably between 70 A.D. and 80 A.D. At this time, Jewish believers became separated from the non-Jewish believers; this separation left non-Jewish believers without an understanding of the Jewish context of the Scriptures. With no apostles or believing Jewish influence, especially in the interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures, this allowed the non-Jews to begin applying secular ideas of or-

der and leadership. No embellishment of the apostles' teachings is excused, as the teachings of Christ were well known. Self-serving people in every generation use whatever source they want to justify their positions of authority and power; some Clergy even generate sources to give themselves relevancy and pass them off as if they were authentic (absolute power corrupts absolutely).<sup>8</sup>

By the time all of Christ's emissaries had returned to Christ's side in heaven, a man by the name of Ignatius, the third pastor of Antioch after Peter died, started the ball rolling with a series of letters, which still define the methods of *all* Church operations today.<sup>9</sup> In these letters, we see the beginning of a pattern of elite Christians trying to take over God's community. This takeover effort began with the good intention of protecting God's community from heresy, particularly Gnosticism. It did not work; Gnosticism ("New Age") is alive today, as is every other form of heresy. What worked splendidly is that a special caste of Christians rose and took control over everyone else.

This new and separate class of priesthood took it upon themselves to create and maintain the powers to control everything Christ's followers would do under the banner of protecting them from heresy. Remember the opening story of this chapter? As the evil emperor took over the galaxy in the name of unity and freedom, the new clerical office would never relinquish the "emergency powers" *it took* to protect God's congregation from heresy. There's nothing democratic in how religious leaders took control.

Ignatius was the first emperor of the Church's empire. He differentiated between God's *klēros* (his people) and the sheep (also

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8 I'll expound more as the book progresses, especially in Chapter 6 "Eschatological Terrorism."

9 Staniforth, 71.

his people).<sup>10</sup> Ignatius made the Clergy a class of specially “called” priests. In his letter to the Congregation at Magnesia-On-The-Meander, Ignatius wrote this:

*Let the bishop preside in the place of God, and his Clergy in place of the Apostolic conclave (emphasis added), and let my special friends the deacons be entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ. . . . In the same way as the Lord was wholly one with the Father, and never acted independently of Him, either in person or through the Apostles, so you yourselves must never act independently of your bishop and Clergy.*<sup>11</sup>

From the above passage, we can see that Ignatius was in favor of, created, and inserted three *offices* of officials into God’s community of believers. They control the Church today—bishop, elder, and deacon. Bishop, priest, pastor, elder, and overseer are the same clerical position even though denominations try to separate them. *Bishop* is just an archaic word that sounds official. *Pastor* is the Latin rendering of *shepherd* and is a gift or talent people have for being caring and loving. *Pastor* is never listed as a position but as gift of care and concern for others. Modern Bible translations opt for the words *overseer* or *pastor* instead of *bishop*. *Elder* went from being an aged person to a position. Ignatius’ language about the Clergy reverberates solidly throughout *all* seven of his letters and through every Church, seminary, and official circle today. Ignatius’ clerical paradigm is still the Church’s status quo of today.

Ignatius maintained that God’s community was not official unless it had a pastor, elders, and deacons.<sup>12</sup> His influence is clearly

10 Maxwell Staniforth, trans. *Penguin Classics: Early Christian Writings*. Revised by Andrew Louth (England: Penguin Books, 1987), 72.

11 Staniforth, 72.

12 K. N. Giles, “Church,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), reproduced in *WORDsearch 7: Thompson Chain Refer-*

seen in Church confessions and statements of faith in Protestant and Evangelical Churches. Ignatius was also the first to distinguish between pastors and elders of the Church. Furthermore, Ignatius put the seed in people's minds that God's community is a physical building.<sup>13</sup> Ignatius is mainly responsible for dividing God's people and crowning mere men as the spiritual princes of the new Church to which he gave birth.

To cement the position of Clergy further, Ignatius also says that "every man who belongs to God and Jesus Christ stands by his bishop."<sup>14</sup> With words like these, who dares refuse the commands of the Clergy? In his letter to the congregation at Smyrna, Ignatius wrote the following:

Follow your bishop, every one of you, as obediently as Jesus Christ followed the Father. Obey your Clergy too, as you would the Apostles; give your deacons the same reverence that you would to a command from God. Make sure that no step affecting the Church is ever taken by anyone without the bishop's sanction. The sole Eucharist you should consider valid is one that is celebrated by the bishop himself, or by some person authorized by him. Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is present, we have the Catholic Church. Nor is it permissible to conduct baptism or the Eucharist without the bishop. On the other hand, whatever does have his sanction can be sure of God's approval too. This is the way to make certain of the soundness and validity of anything you do.<sup>15</sup>

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*ence Bible, Leaders Library's Edition* [CD-ROM] (Austin, TX: WORDsearch, Corp, 2006).

13 Robert C. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 13.

14 Staniforth, 94. Even though *pastor* is a gift rather than a position, I'm using it here as a position since that is what people are most familiar with. *Bishop, priest, pastor, and overseer* represent the same position.

15 Staniforth, 103.

Ignatius planted the seed of the Clergy, which would become the foundation for the Church.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Laity: The Clergy's Children**

Author David Johnson compares the structure of the Church to a healthy family, with the laity as the children and the Clergy as the parent. He writes that the parents occupy a position of authority over the children and provide for their spiritual needs. According to Johnson, the “parents affirm the personhood of their children, while at the same time becoming ever-wiser in their ability to give appropriate consequences for wrong behavior and teach and encourage in right behavior.”<sup>17</sup> The author also happens to be a senior pastor.<sup>18</sup>

Do the Clergy view *their* laity as children? The laity is not allowed to participate in any Church function in any *official* capacity without the prior consent or supervision of the Clergy. According to the Clergy, they alone have been especially ordained by God to teach, lead, guide, and supervise the laity. The amazing thing is that no one ever hears God calling anyone to be the leaders and religious parents of the laity. Christ's call to his apostles was audible and heard by others—not so with the Clergy. The laity must take the Clergy's word that God called them. The Clergy's alleged *call*

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16 There are other players in the Church's birth that explain a great deal of why the Institution did the things it did. I recommend Justo Gonzales' book, *The Story of Christianity*, to get a clearer picture of the Church's beginnings. There are many other excellent historical resources.

17 David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority Within The Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1991), 23.

18 *Ibid.*, According to the author's biography on the back cover.

from God to assume the office is a very convenient way to become the spiritual parents of the unofficial spiritual children.

The Clergy's attitude towards the laity—their children—has ranged from patronizing to contemptuous. When the Scriptures were being translated from Latin into English in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, many officials complained that the Scriptures, or “the Gospel pearl is cast forth and trodden under the foot of swine.”<sup>19</sup> Because Christ had given the good news to his apostles first, the Clergy believed it belonged solely to *them*. The Clergy sees itself as the heritage of the apostles; they believe they are specially called by Christ as the apostles were.<sup>20</sup> It was (and is) unconscionable to the Clergy that the Scriptures should be in the hands of the laity for them to discern what the Scriptures say.<sup>21</sup>

It appears that the Clergy still consider the laity lower in rank before God than themselves, but in today's climate of political correctness, officials use sugarcoated, holy sounding titles like *servant-leader*, *shepherd*, *under-shepherd*, *pastor*, and *minister*. This way, no one is offended, and the Clergy remain in power.

## **When the Adversaries of Freedom Take Control**

The religious establishments of today are no different from those of Jesus' day. People who dare to challenge Church leadership are risking an assault on their character and faith in Christ. The Church and the Clergy are vicious when it comes to protecting their position because, like the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, the

19 H. C. Conant, *The English Bible: History of the Translation of the Holy Scriptures Into the English Tongue with Specimens of the Old English Version* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co, 1856), 100-1.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid. The idea that the laity should have the Scriptures was nothing but “jest” to the Clergy.

Church's Clergy worships the "holy" system and its trappings. The Clergy claims to love its sheep, but it loads them down with religion and its rules, routines, schedules, constitutions, and bylaws.

The Clergy calls anyone who does not conform to its traditional pattern of "doing Church" *rebellious, cultic, heretical, or blasphemous*. Anyone who gets tired of the Clergy and leaves the Church will carry the stigma of being bitter and led astray by the devil. What matters to the Clergy is not that a person is living a free and joyful life, but that he or she is conforming and submitting to them.

Since the Second Century, the Clergy have been calling the shots. The clerical *servant-leaders* have steered believers in Christ away from being freed people and, over time, have parked them in enslavement to religion as the laity. As members of the Church, free believers in Christ are likely to revert back to being the pack mules of religious leaders, just as the ordinary Jews of Jesus' day were loaded down with the religious burdens of Judaism. The Clergy have simply created a box of religion, four walls and a roof, which intends to capture people and makes them part of its religious machine. Sooner or later the religion trap snares all who stay in the Church.

### **Concluding Remarks: Our Only Shepherd**

In the new community, which he established with his death and resurrection, Christ Jesus did away with *offices* and *officials* who preside over believers. Christ is now the only official office holder (Heb. 7:18-25); each of his individual followers serves in the position of priest (1 Pt. 2:9). There is no room for a special class of priests to govern the body of priests that are Christ's followers. As

the High Priest, Christ is the only special class of priest we will ever need.<sup>22</sup>

Anyone who claims a special office over Christ's royal priesthood is a charlatan. The Clergy have stolen and assumed a title that describes *God's entire family—all believers are priests*. The Clergy is a ruse responsible for creating a religious system that wears people out emotionally and spiritually. The following is a prophecy from Scripture about God's extinction of the office of priest (Clergy) and God's role as our true and only shepherd:

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: *I now consider these shepherds my enemies, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to my flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock, and I will stop them from feeding themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths; the sheep will no longer be their prey. ... I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign Lord. I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes—feed them justice!* (emphasis added) (Ez. 34:9-10; Ez. 34:15-16 [NLT])

Our Lord and God Christ Jesus fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy when he said, "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me" (Jn. 10:14 [MSG]). The Good Shepherd also said, "I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace..." (Ez. 34:15 [NLT]). Christ said that he himself would teach those who accept him as their Lord; no one would

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<sup>22</sup> Christ Jesus began a new and better covenant with his blood (Lk. 22:20). Anyone who trusts in Christ Jesus, the High Priest, will live forever with him (Jn. 3:16). Because Christ's believers live forever with him, they too are part of his royal priesthood (1 Pt. 2:9; Rev. 1:5-6). It is God's Spirit that leads and guides his priesthood (Jer. 31:33-34; Ez. 34:15), not a special priesthood set apart from the priesthood.

again ever need a human leader to teach about him, according to the prophet Jeremiah:

“But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the Lord.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the Lord. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.” (Jer. 31:31-34 [NLT])

However, the Clergy took what began as a family, institutionalized it, centralized it, and then capitalized on it by boxing it up, gift-wrapping it, and turning it into a box of religion that holds weekly meetings.

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### 3—The Deception

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**H**ave those who appear to be the closest to you ever deceived you, making you feel a little foolish? Being deceived by someone causes hurt feelings and anger towards the deceiver. Almost anyone will go out of the way to avoid a deceitful person.

Religion is a deceiver. It promises wellbeing, joy, freedom, and even riches, yet it cannot deliver. It cannot give freedom and peace with God because religion is based on things you do to try to earn God's favor. Doing things for God is a never-ending task that inflicts guilt and frustration on the doers; they feel guilty when they do not perform as expected and feel frustrated because it seems that they can never do enough to please God.

One way that religion deceives people is by its promotion of the assumption that the Church as we know it today got its start when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. This is impossible, as the Greek word from which *church* is derived, the "late Greek word"<sup>1</sup> *kyriakon*, did not exist any earlier than two hundred years *after* Jesus' resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Then why is it that the word *church* appears throughout every English Bible and all historical literature? The Clergy has been the one to control the translation of the Bible from the original languages. If the Greek word for *church* did not exist until the Third Century, then where did it come from and why is it in the Bible?

1 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1986), s.v. "Church."

2 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1986), s.v. "Late Greek."

## **Do I have to go to Church?**

The question, “Do I have to go to Church to be a believer in Christ?” is voiced by millions of people who see the hypocrisy and futility of religion. The Church’s usual reply is summed up this way: “If you want to be alienated from God, don’t go to Church; if you want to be reconciled with God, go to Church.” It uses one half of a Scripture verse, Hebrews 10:25, to force them go to its weekly meetings. The first half of the “go to Church” verse, as I like to call it, says this: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing . . .” (NIV).

Interestingly enough the Church stops quoting at the word “doing” instead of finishing the verse. Many who quote this verse does not even know what the rest of the verse says: “. . .but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (NIV). The Church as we know it is stuck on the word *doing*. It wants people to think that performance is a part of walking with God.

The purpose of meeting together is for face-to-face fellowship like a group of friends getting together or like a healthy family reunion; we don’t get this at the Church because we’re too busy looking over the backs of heads at people on a stage. What the Church doesn’t want people to know is the second part of Hebrews 10:25, which says that the purpose of getting together is for encouragement. I don’t know of any greater encouragement than getting together with other believers to hang out and have fun like a family while being centered on Christ—we don’t need sermons to do that. Meeting together can happen anywhere, anytime, any day, and takes only two people, according to Christ: “For where two

or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:20 [NLT]).

The word *church* comes from the Greek word *kyriakon*, which means “house of the Lord;” this is why people typically think Church is a building, a place we go. *Ekklesia* is the Greek word translated as *church* and means *called-out*.<sup>3</sup> This word refers to those who accept Christ’s call to follow him. *Church* is a convenient, misleading word that directs people to believe that they must do something to be right with God.

What the Clergy want is for people to come to the Church—a centralized location—where many people can be herded and watched at one time. We have been taught from diapers that a building is the House of the Lord: “Here is the Church, here is the steeple; open the doors and see all the people.” The Church sets a time and day for people to be present at a meeting and casts nets of shame over those who do not attend it regularly. According to the Clergy, going to the official location—the Church—is *doing* one’s obligation to God to ensure that he or she stays on God’s good side and will not be disciplined.

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3 Originally *kyriakon* was an adjective that was used to describe something as “belonging to the Lord” or something that was “of the Lord’s” as in “the house of the Lord.” Within a short time, *kyriakon* became a noun and was used specifically to denote a people and then later a place. The majority of the resources I consulted define *kuriakon* as *The House of the Lord*. I have included these sources here: Clouse, “Church,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 246; Cross, “Church,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3d. ed., 346; Davis, “Church,” *Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., 146; Miller, “Church,” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 102; Davis, “Apostle,” *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, rev., 111; Kirby, G. W., “Church,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1, 845.

## The House of God

The use of *the house of God* originates from Scripture passages such as Hebrews 10:21, which references God’s heritage/family/bloodline. A family is not a building called Church—it is flesh and blood with emotions and the innate need to interact with each other. In old times, people would refer to a patriarch’s family line as his house. For example, if you’ve attended a Church at all you’ve probably heard the phrases “house of Israel” and “house of David.” These phrases do not refer to a physical building but to the bloodline and family of the named patriarch.

Originally in New Testament times, the Greek word *ekklesia* (*ecclesia* is Latin) that is translated as *church* also referred to God’s family, his heritage, or his lineage. God’s family is made up of those who have answered his call to follow him. Those God calls to follow him he calls out of worldly living into a new and free life with him; these are the *ekklesia*, the *called-out*, and what Bible translations render *church*. So, what’s the scoop? What are we, *church* or *called-out*?

The term *house of God* began to be used in the Second Century by post-apostolic men to refer to the emerging clerical class of Christians. As this clerical caste began to emerge, the *house of God* was used by them to refer to themselves as God’s special lineage instead of everyone who follows God.<sup>4</sup> The Clergy decided that their laity needed them for protection against heresy. Since the new caste of priest—the Clergy—had control over the Scriptures, no one could refute their word—no one had a Bible available to check their accuracy. As the years went by, the Clergy made itself God’s

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<sup>4</sup> Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The story of the English Bible and the Revolution it Inspired* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 114.

voice to his lineage. The Clergy taught that their words were God's own words. Nothing has changed as the pulpit is still proclaimed to be the sacrosanct place of God's authority over his heritage.

The Clergy took matters even further when they centralized God's heritage by saying that the only official gathering is where the pastor is. Before long, the Clergy dedicated specified buildings where they would officiate and dwell. Since the Clergy were present at a specific place and time, they proclaimed that this was where God's official lineage should be (remember Ignatius?). Since the place the Clergy occupied was made official and sacred by the presence of the Clergy, that place would also be called *the House of God*. Sound familiar? The *Temple* in Jerusalem was the Jewish *House of God*. Physical buildings for worshipping God ceased to exist when Christ died and was resurrected. The *House of God* moved from a cold, lifeless building to the individual bodies of God's heritage.

Singlehandedly, the Clergy made itself the lineage of God, dubbed a building *the House of God*, over which they presided with all authority, and made the rest of God's followers into unofficial and second-class followers of God. According to the Clergy, these unofficial followers of God needed them for meaning and purpose; the Clergy dubbed these unofficial followers of God *laity*.

The *house of God, the heritage of God, the lineage of God, the family of God* finally became a building—the House of God—the domain of God's alleged new officials—the Clergy. It is the Clergy that perverted the purity of *the house of God* and changed it to mean an official entity, and building, only made official by their presence. It is because of the early work of the Clergy that we use the phrases *going to Church*, and *doing Church*; it is also why peo-

ple believe that they need a covering (spiritual protection) by the Clergy to be in proper fellowship with God.

Having officials other than Christ is what some might refer to as heresy. The passage from where the Clergy derives “go to Church” is Hebrews 10:19-25. I have added the preceding verses so that you can see the full context:

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

I want to point out that verse 21 says that we have ONE priest over the house/heritage/lineage/legacy/family of God—Christ Jesus. It is he who saves us, leads us, and teaches us. For the Clergy to claim that they are the head of God’s household is to put themselves into the place of God—a doctrine given birth to by Ignatius. Not only are the Clergy being heretical, they are also blaspheming God’s Spirit by making his power to transform and lead subject to the Clergy’s position. Clerical positions render God’s Spirit irrelevant and remove the priesthood of the believer from the laity caste who must now submit to officials.

Every time you see the word *church* in the Bible, you are reading a purposeful mistranslation to protect the Clergy and their domain—the building and organization we know today as *the*

*Church*. So where does that leave us? Do we have to quit calling God's heritage *the Church*? Do we leave all spiritual matters to the Clergy? No.

According to the Bible, each of those who have answered God's call to follow him is clergy—a priest to himself or herself. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:9-10 that we are God's royal priesthood:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10 [NASB95])

We no longer need a priest to stand between God and us. Those who follow Christ our Lord are priests who have direct access to the Most Holy Place—God's throne. As priests, it is incumbent upon us to search for answers to our spirituality, beginning and ending with the *only* source—God. Proverbs 4:7 says, "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding" (NIV). If you want to understand what it means to follow God, and then search for understanding, God will personally teach you according to Proverbs 2:1-6. The Bible says, "the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:6 [NIV]). If we go to the Clergy for answers, we'll get clerical answers every time.

Our defeated adversary the devil uses mistranslated words, various doctrines, and the perversions of men to confuse God's simple message. The word *church*, even though it was placed in the Bible deceitfully, has meaning for people today who are of the house of God—God's body, God's heritage, God's lineage, God's

relatives. *Church*, therefore, in its proper usage, can and does refer to God's bloodline. For lack of a less circulated phrase, *God's true church* is everyone who has acknowledged Christ as Lord and God. Whether we are alone or assembled, we are God's heritage—his church. It does not matter where I am, or whether or not I'm with other family members, I am still my Father's—the Lord's—child and heritage. *When two or more of God's heritage congregate, wherever they may be, they make an assembled group of God's church.*

God's heritage—his lineage—is not a weekly congregation meeting on one day, at one time, in one building, and under the direction of one man. No, God's heritage is not an organization, or building, or leadership structure; God's heritage is the face you see in the mirror. I am God's heritage, and you are God's heritage if you trust in Christ.

### **The Greek Ekklesia: A Church Idea**

“The Greek words that combine to make the word *ekklesia* are *ek* (out of) and *klesis* (a calling); this combination was used “among Greeks of a body of citizens ‘gathered’ to discuss the affairs of state.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, a Greek *ekklesia* was a congregation of Greek citizens officially *called-out* by a Greek official for a particular purpose, to be under the authority of that official. The Greek understanding was that an officially called congregation of people met *in one place* and that their meeting was an official event that took place on certain days, at certain times, and at certain locations. Sounds like the Church, does it not?

*Ekklesia* can be kind of tricky to understand because it is a Greek word used today the way secular Greeks used it 2,000 years

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5 Vine, 42.

ago.<sup>6</sup> The Church capitalizes on the Greek definition of *ekklesia* to ensure that there is an official congregation governed by the Clergy. However, *Christ gave specific instructions not to follow the secular Greek example of “called-out” citizens with official leaders:*

Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. “But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45 [NASB])

Christ’s *ekklesia* is special and different from the *Greek secular ekklesia* and the religions of the world; without a doubt, Christ’s called-out do not comprise the Church because it is a location controlled by an official. In fact, Peter wrote to Christ’s followers, “You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for *he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light*” (emphases added) (1 Pt. 2:9 [NLT]). In other words, Father God calls us to be born into his family.

The *called-out* are God’s special possession, and he treasures us above everything else that belongs to him. As the Bible says in 1 Peter 2:9, God’s *called-out* is a heavenly nation and family of priests, a claim that no Church can make. God is the one who calls out people to follow him and to be in fellowship with each other in a familial sense.

Many people interpret *ekklesia* as *congregation* or *assembly*. This can also be a way of making a group of the called-out ones official—

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6 Ekklesia is Greek and Ecclesia is Latin.

to be governed by an official. So that there is no misunderstanding or any chance that this book promotes the idea that a congregation can be made official, let me explain the difference between *called-out* and *assembly/congregation*. *Called-out* is what Christ's followers are, *assemble* or *congregate* is what Christ's called-out do when two or more get together; *assembly* or *congregation* describes Christ's called-out when they get together. All of Christ's called-out make up God's family, and God is our only parent.

### **This Thing Called the Church**

The following is how one author clearly sets the Church apart from God's family:

We organize this Thing. We name *it*, incorporate *it*, elect officers to *it*, open bank accounts in *its* name, and train and hire staff to run *it*. We take up money for *it*. We devise campaigns to recruit more people to join *it*. We track attendance to *it*. We love *it*, get mad at *it*, resign from *it*, and leave *it*. If we are particularly fond of *it*, we make up brochures and buy ads to market *it*. We evaluate the Thing to determine *its* success or failure. "The praise service was good," we might say. "The sermon was okay." The offering was poor." "The attendance was down."<sup>7</sup>

Even the government has a definition of the Church; it also recognizes most religions (even Satan worshippers) as Churches. All Churches submit to the government's guidelines so their donors can receive tax deductions. These guidelines, developed by the IRS and by court decisions, are a matter of public record and may be found in the Internal Revenue Service's Publication 1828. The following are the IRS's criteria for a true Church:

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Elliott Newbold, Jr., *The Harlot Church System Come Out Of Her, My People*. Monterey: Ingathering Press, 1999), 14.

...distinct legal existence; recognized creed and form of worship; definite and distinct ecclesiastical government; formal code of doctrine and discipline; distinct religious history; membership not associated with any other church or denomination; organization of ordained ministers; ordained ministers selected after completing prescribed courses of study; literature of its own; established places of worship; regular congregations; regular religious services; Sunday schools for the religious instruction of the young; schools for the preparation of its ministers.<sup>8</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

We cannot *do church, go to church, build a church, plant a church* anymore than we can *do heritage, go to heritage, erect a heritage, and plant a heritage*. Either you are God's church or you are not. No one has to assemble to be God's church. If you are God's church, no one can qualify or disqualify you, period. It is God who calls you out of the world to follow him, it is he who leads you, and it is he—and only he—who is the official.

I hope these last few pages have helped give meaning to Hebrews 10:25 for you: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (NIV). The powers of death and hell can never defeat God's heritage because of God's personal leadership and protection.

You are no longer required to go to the place the Clergy has dubbed *the Church*; you never had to go there in the first place.

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<sup>8</sup> Internal Revenue Service, IRS Publication 1828: Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations: Benefits and Responsibilities Under the Federal Tax Law (2006), 23.



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## 4—The Bloody Sword and its Sheath

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**R**oger Williams upheld that the Church was guilty of the blood of souls; history books agree with him. In the Middle Ages, the Church's leaders withheld "the pearl of the Clergy," the Bible, from the hands of "swine," the laity, and used it to bring about the subjugation of the non-official believers in Christ.

Since the laity had no access to the Bible, the Clergy could teach its laity only what they wanted them to know. Education gave the Church's officials the advantage over the uneducated laity; in fact, the term *layman* means to be uneducated and non-professional. In most cases, the laity, or laymen, could not read or write and could not own a copy of the Bible, so they had to depend upon the Clergy to handle spiritual matters for them (or so they were led to believe). The Clergy began to embellish the Bible and soon replaced it with their own tradition. Still, the laity did not know the difference because they could not read the Bible; they could only trust what the Clergy told them. The Clergy was, after all, in God's place of leadership over the laity.

### **From Common to Uncommon**

Originally, the New Testament Scriptures were written in the common language of the people of the First Century—*Koine* ("common") Greek.<sup>1</sup> The New Testament could have been written in Classic Greek, accessible only to higher classes of people, but it

1 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1986), s.v. "koine."

was not; most of Christ's disciples were unschooled and untrained except for a basic education in the Torah. The New Testament was written in the common language of the day so that even those with limited or no formal education could understand it. Now, only the learned and specially *called* people are the ones to control the translation of Scripture. The Clergy essentially *owns* the Scriptures and exposit its meanings according to a clerical paradigm.

The *original* Bible manuscripts, written by the *original* authors in the *original* languages, are without error. However, translations from First Century Greek into English reflect the biases and prejudices of the translators—who happen to be members of the Clergy.

As the Greek Bible began to be translated into Latin,<sup>2</sup> the Clergy manipulated the translation to benefit themselves and to maintain their authority. They used religious or ecclesiastical terms to solidify their authority and status. The ecclesiastical words in the Bible—*church*, for instance, its Greek equivalent which cannot be found in the original manuscripts—were inserted and coined by the Clergy when translating the Bible from the original languages into languages such as Latin and English.

The Bible was easily and readily understood by the people of New Testament times. They did not need a teacher or specially educated believer to explain what was read out loud. Of course, there were no printing presses, so manuscripts had to be read aloud and copied by hand to be available for subsequent generations. When the Clergy took the religious field, they laid claim to the Scriptures and used the Greek sermon, built on pagan Greek rhetoric, as the vehicle to interpret the Scriptures to the laity. Today, preachers' ser-

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2 The Clergy considered Latin the language of angels.

mons are only about five percent Scripture and ninety-five percent personal opinion about what the Scripture says. If this is true then how can the Clergy claim to preach God's word?

As outlined in Chapter 2, by the Second Century, the Clergy became the central focus of and the authority over everything their *flocks* did. Their *flocks* could not move spiritually without their approval. The Clergy and their pulpits became *the* Bible as they took upon themselves the authority to govern the lives of *their* flocks. They taught that what came from the pulpit were God's own words and were to be obeyed to the letter. The officials behind the pulpit began deciding what the laity should know, do, and think.

### **First Blood**

When we think of the Roman Coliseum, we think of gladiators, executions, and Christians being fed to wild animals. Historically speaking, the Romans drew first blood from Christ's followers when they mercilessly persecuted them. The Romans did not understand the concept of one God and considered Christ's followers heretics and blasphemers because they did not worship the many Roman gods.

Spiritually speaking, first blood was drawn by the Clergy, who professed to stand in God's place of authority over his followers. This blood ran much deeper, thicker, and redder than what was spilled in the Roman Coliseum because it was the freedom of Christ's followers that was being shed. No longer were they free to live by their consciences before God; now they had to perform for religious leaders like puppets on a string. The laity-sheep were now the wards of the Church.

When the Clergy was firmly in control, they began to treat the laity shamefully: the Medieval practice of the selling of indulgences to ease sin-ridden consciences is only one example of the Clergy's mistreatment of the laity. The Church always kept the threat of torture and death as possibilities for those who dared defy it and its officials—all of this in the name of God, of course.

Little changed over the years as those protesting the original Roman Church traded bishops and the pope in Rome for the pastor and minister in the local Church. The new pastor taught about the priesthood of each believer in Christ, yet he still stood between the believer and God. The pastor still delivered the Greek-styled lectures—sermons—built on the principles of Greek rhetoric, collected money, and taught the people which doctrines to believe. The pastor was still the official who performed all of the sacraments as official ordinances. The pastor is still the Clergy and the Church since only he is official. The Reformation changed nothing, except that now the Church's spiritual leader no longer has his throne in Rome—he now has one at each local Church.

During the time period in which the Enlightenment and Reformation took place, the printing press was invented. The Church tried to suppress the free printing of the Bible, but too many inquiring minds and self-thinkers wanted to see the Bible for themselves. Meeting places sprang up, Bibles became plentiful, but the Church maintained that the laity still needed pastors and ministers of God to explain the Scriptures to them.<sup>3</sup>

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3 Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1. San Francisco: Harpercollins Publisher, 1985), 342-75.

Along with the newly translated Bibles, spiritual movements and denominations arose. Monarchies even relented from their persecution of non-Catholic and non-Protestant believers.

Even though most Church members in the free world possess a Bible or have free access to one, they still gather in one place, at one time, under the authority of one person, and this one person is trained in rhetoric<sup>4</sup> is still delivering Greek-styled sermons.<sup>5</sup> Every person in the Church still focuses on one person who tells him or her what the Bible says even though they have a copy in their own language in front of them.

## The Cutlass of Spiritual Death

The Clergy—bishops, elders, priests, pastors, preachers, ministers, and deacons—has been trying to take the place of God for almost 2,000 years. Ministers have been waving around the Bible, what they call *the sword of the Spirit*, and have been using it to pierce the free hearts of people.

Some say that the *sword of the Spirit* Paul refers to in Ephesians 6:17 is the Bible; this is a weapon used by the Clergy to insist that the laity needs to listen to them when they “preach the word of God.” This is the Clergy’s attempt to equate its sermons with the Bible and God’s Spirit. The *sword of the Spirit* is not the Bible, though the Bible contains the words used as the sword of the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit are the Scriptures made alive by God’s Spirit

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4 Jerry Vines and Jim Shadix, *How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 229.

5 C. Brown, et al. *Steps to the Sermon: An Eight Step Plan for Preaching with Confidence*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 16.

that impacts our lives as we walk with God. Christ is the Word that guides us (Jer. 31:3-34; Jn. 1:1-5).

We do not have a friendship with the Scriptures but with the Word—Christ, who is the wisdom of God. The words of the Bible cannot save anyone; it is God’s Spirit that makes them come alive. The devil quoted Scripture to Christ in the desert in Matthew 4, yet the devil is still condemned. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul is not talking about memorizing Scripture as a weapon, as Sunday School teachers insist their students do; when Paul talks of the sword of the Spirit, he is speaking about the knowledge of God that comes from meeting with him daily.<sup>6</sup> As we walk with God during our lifetime, his Spirit makes the Scriptures come alive in our hearts.

The Church insists that everyone must live by the Bible-Book, yet no Church or denomination can agree about what constitutes the proper Book. Some claim that people are hell-bound if they read any version other than a particular one. Cults excel in using the “the written word” as a way to mislead others. Women are hushed in meetings because of scriptural misuses; preachers pound their pulpits with their Book, people claim to stand on the Book and will denounce any who dare question their rendering of it. “If it’s in this Book,” they say, “we do it whether or not we understand the context!” This Book is misquoted and thrown around to make a point or to rebuke anything the religious do not like. The Bible is treated more like a religion and a god than what it is—a tool, a Book to guide our walk with God and confirm our faith in him.

The people of the Book get nasty when they are disputed. These people misuse the Scriptures to make people worship, attend Church functions, pay a tithe, submit to them, support the Clergy,

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<sup>6</sup> Vine, “Word,” 683.

witness, and increase Church memberships. The men and women of the Book use it as a sword to threaten people with disaster and eternal damnation if they do not obey them—the keepers of the Book. Yes, the Bible is indeed a sword; it is a bloody sword in the hands of the Clergy and the religious to thrust continually into the hearts of people. This sword is an effective tool that the Clergy holds to the throat of Christ's bride so they can violate her with religion. Christ's blood of freedom that pumps and flows through the hearts and spiritual veins of believers ends up shooting to the ground and the bloody sword gets wiped off on the vestments of religion.

Once wiped off after every service, the Clergy of the sword slip it back into its sheath—the pulpit—until next Sunday's spiritual massacre. The only ones who are equipped and licensed to wield this sword are the people of the Book—the Clergy. They are willing to tell people about it, but they never turn people loose with it to allow them to live a free life to its fullest.

### **What If There Were No Bibles**

The First Century Christians did not have a Bible—they had Christ, the Old Testament Scripture, and a smattering of what we call the New Testament. They thrived and multiplied without a Bible or officials because they had Christ's Spirit to guide them. Today, we have the benefit of having most of what the original apostles wrote and have God himself to teach and guide us, so why do we need a human to wave his weapon of violence around at us and tell us those very things that we can read for ourselves?

I do not want to give anyone the impression that the Bible does not need to be read. The New Testament says, "All Scripture is in-

spired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17 [NLT]).

Without the Spirit of Christ dwelling within the reader, the entire Bible amounts to just a compilation of words, making the Bible just another book. However, the Holy Spirit can speak to people through the words of the Bible as they read it; the Spirit makes those words come alive if a person is ready to heed them. The Bible is the tool of Christ’s Spirit, but is powerless without Christ’s Spirit.

When the primary focus is on the Scriptures and not the living and present Spirit of Christ, then it creates a need for a special caste of Christians to oversee and proclaim the Scriptures—the Clergy. The Clergy proclaims that the Bible is preeminent over the lives of believers and that without it no one can be saved from going to hell. The Clergy benefits the most from the “preeminence of the Scriptures over the believers” since it controls the translation and meaning of the Scriptures. In this case the power of the Scriptures are relative and subjective to denominational and clerical interpretation. As the result from the Clergy’s stance on the Scriptures, the Bible becomes the Church’s leverage that prevents the laity from wondering too far from the confines of its walls.

What has preeminence over a believer’s life? There seems to be two schools of thought on this matter. The first one is “the Preeminence of the Scriptures Over Your Life,” i.e., without the Scriptures no one could know Christ personally and end up in hell. From this doctrine come such thoughts as, “You need to hear God’s word preached regularly,” “You need to be involved in week-

ly Bible study and in Sunday School,” “You need to be in Church,” “You need worship,” etc. The bottom line of these statements is to make the Clergy look good—the greater number of those attending the Church, the better the Clergy look.

The second school of thought is “the Preeminence of Christ Over Your Life,” i.e., without Christ’s Spirit in your life the Scriptures are merely words that are easily manipulated for personal gain and personal agendas. This school of thought removes the necessity of the Clergy and their sermons and empowers the “priesthood of the believer.” This doctrine is dangerous to the religious elite because it removes them from having a say from a pulpit about how a person relates to God in her personal relationship with him. Spiritual freedom is dangerous to religion, especially the Church.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the questions I pose are these: How could we ever become followers of Christ without a Bible? If people do not have access to a Bible, does that mean that they cannot follow Christ or grow as his followers? If someone cannot read, how can he or she ever walk with God? If even the illiterate can become a part of God’s family, and if God’s Spirit dwells within them and teaches them through relationship (as the Old Testament proclaims God does in Jeremiah 31:31-34), then would that not make relationship primary in our walk with God? This places the Scriptures in a supporting role and Christ in the leading role.

A supporting role does not mean that the Bible is unimportant to a believer’s walk with God; it means that the Scriptures reinforce God’s love for us and removes excuses to live however one

desires. Take love letters for an example; love letters cannot replace personal time with a spouse, but they can reinforce the love one spouse has for the other. My wife and I enjoy leaving each other love notes even while we are together; they renew and strengthen our love. If I studied her love letters to me the majority of my life with her, instead of focusing on my relationship with her, our relationship would not grow and our love for each other would remain in a infantile stage.

The Church makes everything depend on its varying denominations' subjective interpretations of the Bible instead of on the person of Christ. When all of the Church's actions are motivated by a subjective interpretation of the Bible-Book, then the bearers of the Book—the Clergy—have absolute authority to discern and then teach what it thinks is important to the laity. Absolute power corrupts absolutely; a walk through Church and world history books prove this to be true.

## 5—Proselytizing: The Church’s Assault on Freedom

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I sat in amazement as the clergyman accompanying me to a fast food restaurant interrupted a couple’s breakfast to “witness” to them. This couple was enjoying the opportunity to have a meal alone. I have three children, so I know what it is like to want to have a quiet moment alone with my wife.

I had just had a conversation with this clergyman about my leaving the Church. As is the custom of the Clergy, this man began to quiz me on how many people I had witnessed to in the past week and how many I had won to the Lord. I answered his question with the same question. He did not answer but turned to the nearest table and began to witness to this couple, not out of love and concern for them, but as an attempt to make a point or fulfill a quota.

The couple was polite, but I could see that they were wishing that this clergyman would go away. He did not—he kept on talking up a religious storm. I began to feel sorry for them and became embarrassed at what he was doing, so I left the restaurant and went to my van. He came out about five minutes later brimming with spiritual confidence at his recent witnessing safari. There was nothing friendly about this encounter as the whole point of the conversation with this couple was to convert them, not to get to know them.

America is one of the few remaining countries where religious groups are allowed to go to a person’s home unannounced and un-

invited. France was one of the first major countries that barred such intrusion because it interfered with personal liberty and privacy, and now I understand why. Telephone marketers take advantage of people's unwillingness to be rude and end up preying on and invading homes with their phone calls. People are taught at home never to cut anyone off while they are speaking. Unless someone is strong against coercion, trained proselytizers and salesmen can read their target like a psychologist and manipulate their target with ease. In my past, I have been manipulated by people who were evangelistic professionals and knew how to get the result they were looking for; in the end I felt used and angry, and since they claimed to represent God, I got angry at God, too.

Churches are no different as they excel in home invasions when their witnessing or visitation teams arrive unannounced to push an agenda that entails manipulation. Churches also excel in the public arena when these squads traverse public places and events with tracts in hand, armed with carefully and professionally developed methods meant to steer people to a desired conclusion. Proselytizing is just an extension of the Church's propaganda machine, which uses techniques instead of real friendships to try to change lives. When a target rejects a witnessing pitch, the witness makes the target feel as if he is rejecting Christ. In actuality, the target probably is rejecting what he perceives as an attempt to manipulate him into acquiescing to the pitch.

Proselytizing, which is a form of propaganda, is the foundation for increasing the numerical growth of the Church, not for improving lives. If it were about improving lives, then the goal would be to make life-long friends by being a friend instead of using a method. Every tract and proselytizing pitch I have ever used, heard, and

seen uses some form of manipulation to provoke a desired response from the target of the pitch.

I am not against telling people the good news of Christ. What I am pointing out in this chapter is that the harm comes when consciences are violated with fear, guilt, shame, and misuse of Scripture to force a decision from them.

### **Proselytizing: The Preferred Method of Religious Groups**

What is a proselyte? In Greek, *proselyte* meant a “person who comes to a place.”<sup>1</sup> For the Jews, proselytizing was not only about converting someone to Judaism, but also about converting someone to the central location of Judaism—the place known as the Temple. Every Jew was required to make the Temple his central place of worship for specific times of the year, as well as the synagogue on a weekly basis. When someone was converted to Judaism, they were converted to the place of Judaism, much in the same way that the Church tries to convert people to its central location—the bricks and mortar called the Church.

Proselytizing runs on the same principle as any religious group like the Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, etc. The ultimate goal of any religious group is to make loyal members by convincing them to attend their worship facilities and to support those facilities financially. This is broken down into smaller goals. The first step is to get into the home of a prospective member and then unload a sales presentation that is devised to capture the heart and spirit of that person.

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1 John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 416.

Religious groups try to persuade their targets to make some commitment and/or attend religious services. *Religion is always centered on a place and requires something of its members.* Proselytizing is exactly this and is used effectively by the Church. Propaganda is also the hallmark of a cult, because it has to use methods other than personal credibility to influence people's minds and get them to its location.

If you look back at the apostles of the New Testament, you will see that they did not proselytize; it was their personal credibility and God's power in them that people noticed; sometimes this gave them opportunities to share Jesus' message. The apostles lived among people and never forced themselves on others; for example, Acts 3:1-10 tells how a crippled man at the Temple gate knew the reputations of Peter and John, and when he saw them, *had to get their attention* to ask them for money. Another example of the apostles' credibility is seen in Acts 4:13: "The members of the [Jewish] council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus" (NLT).

### **Legal Violation**

Going to homes or invading a person's space unannounced to proselytize is unfortunately a legal form of violation by the Church and other groups. Personally, I hope that in the near future invading someone's space, home, and telephone lines without an invitation will be illegal; I would like to protect those who are not strong enough to reject the advances of those who would violate them spiritually.

The main purpose of the Church's proselytizing groups is not to make friends, but to convert people to its religion and get them to Church. Within the time Church representatives are in the home of a potential proselyte, they employ manipulative methods to make the person believe they are interested in him, want to be his friend, and want the best for him. The first two to five minutes of the conversion process revolves around personal pleasantries meant to set the potential convert's mind at ease so he will be more receptive to the proselytizing pitch.

I remember sitting in a twelve-week witnessing course where the instructors warned against calling a prospect's home before going so the prospect would not leave in order to avoid the proselytizing group. One of the ways I was taught to enter a person's home with a proselytizing group unannounced is this: "Hi, Judy. We wanted to thank you personally for visiting First Evangelical Church's Vacation Bible School this past summer; we thought we'd return the favor and visit you. May we come in and talk to you?"

If the answer is *yes*, then the proselytizing conversation will begin with questions about the individual to convince the person that the Church is interested in her. After about two to five minutes, the conversation is pointed towards the real reason the proselytizing group has come to visit—to convert the target. All along, the person facing the wave of witnessing has no idea of the real reason these Church people have visited her home. The group has led her to believe that they are interested in her; and then they launch the presentation. They begin with this question: "If you were to die today and you stood before God and he were to ask you 'Why should I let you into my heaven,' what would you say?" What a manipulative and unbiblical question especially since God is capable

of asking his own questions! Plus how do proselytizers know God would ask this question? I have not been able to find this question anywhere in the Scriptures.

The whole proselytizing effort is scripted, designed to manipulate the emotions of the target and steer him or her to a desired conclusion. As a car salesman uses pressure tactics to get someone to buy a car, a Church's proselytizing effort builds to a crescendo and ends up giving the target two choices that pressure the poor victim to make a decision—go to heaven to be with God or burn in hell forever. Taking the choice to go to heaven is a no-brainer, so many will purchase “fire insurance” by accepting Christ in order to keep from going to hell. The Clergy does the same thing from the pulpit, and evangelists do it all the time. Any good con artist can get most unsuspecting people to come to a decision.

Any time someone uses any form of coercion or propaganda to get new members, customers, or influence people to do something, emotional and spiritual violation has been perpetrated. Guilt and fear are the preferred accomplices to any person, group, Church, or religion attempting to influence consciences. Maybe the best solution to keep us from being spiritually violated by Churches and evangelists is never to listen to their message *unless we know them personally*. We tell our children never to talk to or ride with strangers, but adults do not heed the same advice because we allow people to invade the most precious and special places in the world: our hearts and souls. The chance that proselytizers of any kind will approach you during your lifetime is phenomenal, since religious personalities dominate the airwaves on the radio and television.

### **Concluding Remarks: The Bottom Line**

Proselytizing is an affront to personal liberty and an invasion of spiritual privacy, in direct opposition to the life of Christ and his disciples. They used their lives and loving deeds to draw others to God. This is why Christ's apostles made such an impact in the world; their words were solidified by their actions. They did not need any form of coercion or proselytizing programs to get people to change their minds and follow Christ. A fifteen-minute proselytizing effort does not represent Christ's presence in the world; it is seen in his living and breathing temples known as his *ekklesia*, his community, his heritage.



## 6—Eschatological Terrorism

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Voices over the last century have been bellowing, “Prepare to meet thy doom; the End is near!” Preachers pound their pulpits and shout warnings of impending disaster and hell fire for those who do not walk down the aisle to be saved from God’s imminent judgment on their souls. They also use the rapture—that time when all believers are snatched away from earth to be with Christ, leaving only the non-believers to deal with God’s wrath—to manipulate people by asking, “Will you be left behind when the rapture comes?” Who in the name of logical thinking wants to be left to deal with God’s wrath? The Church uses the rapture, as some call it, and God’s wrath as portrayed in Revelation as the leverage of fear to get people to attend it, be faithful to it, and submit to the Clergy.

Eschatology is the study of end times (the end of life as we know it) and is a tool of manipulation for the Church. The underlying emotion supporting the use of this tool of manipulation is fear of the unknown. Fear is a favored weapon of terrorists. The Church uses this kind of terrorism to keep people in a state of fear so they will support spiritual institutionalism. It uses the Hebrew apocalyptic language of the Bible to keep fear and uncertainty in the hearts of people, but then it offers a solution to ease fears by bidding people to come to it for understanding and assurance. When a disaster happens, people flock to the Church, looking for answers.

The Church specializes in holding Revelation studies for people who want to know the future, but these studies leave people

worrying more about the future than the present day. Contrary to what people are being led to believe, the Bible teaches that when a person confesses Jesus as Lord, believes in him, and loves his neighbor, there is *no need to worry about what might happen in the future*. Jesus said this about worry: “Therefore, don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:34 [HCSB]).

I want to ensure that you understand something. I do not know the future, nor can I say or will I say rigidly that future events are going to happen in any particular way. The purpose of this chapter is to show you that the dogmatic approach of the Church, in regards to eschatology, is simply speculation that is built upon the most popular paradigm known as Premillennial Dispensationalism (PD).<sup>1</sup> It is from this paradigm that Bible passages such as Matthew 24 and the entire book of Revelation are translated and understood. Defenders of the PD theory usually have charts, graphs, and many other “factual” documents that they claim lend credence to their position (I used to be one of them). Anyone can create graphs and charts to prove what they want proved. It is from the PD mindset that many Churches push people around to make them adhere to their eschatological doctrine.

I am providing you with some information so you can be better informed and make up your own mind. This does not mean that believing in PD or any other theory is wrong; it just means

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1 Premillennial Dispensationalism is the belief that after Christians are raptured (snatched away) from the earth by Christ, there will be three and a half years of peace, followed by three and a half years of great tribulation. When he comes back after this, Christ is going to thrash the devil and all his followers by throwing them into hell; then he’ll reign for a 1,000 years, and immediately following will be God’s judgment where he sends people to hell or heaven.

that any theories about the end time are just theories; God is the only one who knows what is going to happen. So in your freedom, believe in whatever theory you believe to be true because *no one but God has the final say on the future.*

With this chapter, I will show you how the Church and the Clergy take events that have possibly already happened and use them as a weapon of fear to keep people in dependence on them. I hope what I have included in this chapter will remove the shackles of fear and help you focus on today and living in God's love. Once you see how PD and like theories work to keep you centered on the Church, you can focus on living for today and not be concerned with what might happen tomorrow. Not having to worry about one more thing is freedom in itself.

## **The End of the Age**

The Great Commission is used as leverage to continue to get people to support the Church and all of its functions financially. Churches teach that before Christ can come back, the good news must be proclaimed all over the world. So evangelical Churches do whatever they can to rush Christ's return. One of the favored passages of Scripture behind this urgency is Matthew 24. In this passage, Jesus describes the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

When his apostles asked when the Temple was going to be destroyed, Jesus told them "this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the entire world as a testimony to all nations. *And then the end will come* (emphasis added)" (Matt. 24:14 [HCSB]). Evangelicals use Matthew 24:30 to try to convince people that the

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<sup>2</sup> I placed Matthew 24:1-34 at the end of the book as an appendix for your information.

end Jesus was talking about was what some call his Second Coming, which includes the *rapture*, *judgment* etc. Is this a big misinterpretation of Jesus' return? Matthew 24:30 speaks of "the sign of the Son of Man" appearing in the sky and says that "they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (NIV). Soon after the deaths of the apostles,<sup>3</sup> Jesus' prophecies about the end of the Temple age happened (about 70 A.D).

According to Scripture, riding on the clouds was a metaphor for God's justice, a common idiom used in Jewish apocalyptic literature. For example, Psalms refers to the One who rides on clouds (Ps. 68:4), and speaks of making the clouds His chariot (104:3). Isaiah wrote about God's coming judgment on Egypt: "Look, *the LORD rides on a swift cloud* and is coming to Egypt. Egypt's idols will tremble before Him, and Egypt's heart will melt within it" (emphasis added) (Is. 19:1 [HCSB]).

All of the heavenly events spoken of in Matthew 24 could very easily be borrowed from Old Testament apocalyptic literature, which was very familiar to the Jews (such as the language found in the writings of Old Testament prophets Daniel and Ezekiel). Matthew 24:30 could be referencing the second return of the Messiah if this verse was separated from the context of the chapter. However, after Christ answers the apostles' question "When will these things happen?" he tells them in verse 34 that their generation, that is the apostles' generation, would not die until the events spoken of in Matthew 24 had happened. This alone keeps verse one through thirty-four in the same context of the destruction of the Temple. The context of the entire chapter of Matthew must be speaking of the events surrounding the Temple's destruction.

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3 Many argue that John lived until the end of the First Century.

However, Matthew 24 is used as a tool in the Church's futuristic PD theory.

Jesus also spoke of the end of the age in Matthew 28:20. What did Christ mean by this? The end of the age that Christ spoke of in Matthew 28:20 was the end of the Temple age: Temple worship and the apostles' ministry. Yes, Christ will be with his people until the end of the world, but in this context, Jesus was speaking to his eleven apostles about the end of *their* generation, commonly known as the apostolic age, which ended around the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 A.D.<sup>4</sup>

### **Revealing Revelation**

Most of what John prophesied about in Revelation probably had to do with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and all of the horror that went along with it. I say this because the events of Matthew 24 and Revelation are closely related. Of course, the Church teaches that John wrote Revelation in A.D. 90 to 95; that would mean that these prophecies speak of a future event, the end of time when God will judge humanity by how it lived. I suspect that the Church teaches this so they can use fear to keep people in attendance. Revelation studies are the source of much religious ado over nothing and cause further divisions about events that no one can prove will happen the way anyone believes or says they will.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Also, Act 1:1-11 corroborates the same event as Matthew 28:18-20, and gives further evidence that Christ was speaking about the end of the apostolic age to his apostles only. In both passages Christ is clearly alone with and is speaking to the eleven disciples.

5 In Revelation studies, the Church focuses on God's wrath and judgment. Once again we see that fear is an effective tool of the Church to keep people in step with it. The Church also uses Revelation to scare the fires of hell out of

Many just cannot comprehend any other possible explanation of what a great many evangelicals call the *End Times*. It has been repeatedly proclaimed that its interpretation of Matthew 24 and Revelation is the way it is going to be. It uses the end of Revelation to instill fear into anyone who will not go along with its interpretation. The following passage is what the Church uses to threaten any who do not conform to its rendering of what is going to happen in the future:

I testify to everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of this prophetic book, God will take away his share of the tree of life and the holy city, written in this book. He who testifies about these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:18-20 [HCSB])

What the Church fails to expound on is Jesus' own words when he says, "I am coming quickly" (Rev. 22:20 [HCSB]). By *quickly*, did Jesus mean 70 A.D., or did he mean two, three, or four thousand years later? The Church's paradigm teaches that the End Times spoken of in Matthew 24 and Revelation are still to come. It has most everyone believing that these events are coming the way it says the End Times are going to happen, and those who do not believe the Church's version of it are doomed. This is an extremely effective tactic of fear.

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people. The loud message this sends to people is that God is ticked off and is biding his time to throw sinners into the lake of fire. When these studies and sermons are over, the Church throws in God's love and grace in as an afterthought: "Oh, by the way, God loves you and wants you to accept his grace, but if you don't he's going to send you to hell to burn forever and ever."

## The “How Quick” Debate

There are many theories about the end of time, and in case you were wondering, I am a Pan-Theorist—everything will pan out for those whose trust is in Christ, so believers in Christ have nothing to worry about. In any event, it does not matter if I am right or wrong about the end times; what does matter is that each person goes to God personally and asks him, not me or the Clergy, for wisdom and guidance. When we walk with our Father, we have no need to worry about future events. Besides, Christ wanted us to be concerned only with our todays and never with our tomorrows.

Jesus says he is coming quickly. If we look at the word *quickly* from a PD (Premillinnial Dispensationalism) or like theory, “I am coming quickly” means “When I return I’ll do so expeditiously and without delay.”<sup>6</sup> If we translated the Greek word *quickly* without the lenses of any theological paradigm, and within the context of the passage, we would be left with this meaning, “I am coming shortly.” John includes his hope for Jesus’ return in the near future, “He which testifieth these things saith, ‘Surely, I come quickly. Amen.’ *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*” (emphasis added) (Rev. 22:20 [KJV]).

What John says at the end of Revelation matches his words at the beginning of Revelation. In Revelation 1:1 John wrote this: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, *the things which must soon take place*; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John” (emphasis added) (Rev. 1:1 [NASB95]).

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<sup>6</sup> Vines, 503. This is a possible meaning if the rest of the verse is ignored.

Combined with Matthew 24, it appears as if the book of Revelation is speaking of the same event that was to happen soon after John wrote Revelation. I know this may be hard for some to digest, but that is only because of what has been hammered into our brains by the Church for so many years. All of the events that John and Matthew recorded can be manipulated easily by any paradigm sanctioned by the Church. Over a long period of time, the Church has conditioned its members to act and respond in certain ways to its paradigms to whatever best suits the institution—not the needs of individuals. If the Church was in tune with its members and cared about their needs, it would set them free to walk in a day-to-day relationship with God without ever having to worry about what will happen tomorrow.

### **The Spill Over Effect**

In the last 200 years, the Church has created a missions and witnessing frenzy. It scares people to the altar, makes them afraid of the future, or just makes them sick of what they see as a Christian message of fear and intimidation. The Church uses any means available to manipulate people. Churches push a program for a mission cause that has already been completed. It uses fear of the unknown to keep people plugged into its system.

To make matters even more interesting, eschatology has somehow managed to spill over into the Great Commission, which turned it into a lifelong endeavor by *all* of Christ's followers. Matthew 24 and the entire book of Revelation fit nicely into the Church's plan to institutionalize the world. They use Matthew 24 as the key passage that says Christ is coming back after the good news is preached throughout the world; the Church uses this to its

advantage to try to hasten Christ's return. This is what Christ said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14 [KJV]).

The Church also uses Matthew 24:42 to strike fear in those who do not support its cause. "Those who do not evangelize or support evangelism," missionaries say, "will face judgment at the end of time when Christ comes back." Here is what Jesus said: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matt. 24:42 [NIV]).

The fear of the future is a wonderful and effective gimmick of control intended to instill terror in people. Fear is the tool of a cult and the main weapon of a terrorist. What better way to keep people glued to the Church and the Clergy than to say they are there to keep you ready for that time you least expect? It all comes down to whose version of Matthew 24 and Revelation is true and who has the most to gain from those who adhere to that version. What does it matter if someone belongs to God through Jesus and gets his theory wrong? Will God destroy someone because of that? The Church gives that impression for its own purposes.

### **About the Great Commission**

I come from an *extreme* religious right, evangelical denominational background. I was trained in proselytizing as a Church member and as a seminary student. I have felt guilty because I was led to believe I was not doing enough to carry out Christ's Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. I got to hear and see Great Commission programs that would make me feel even guiltier about not doing enough. Maybe not everyone who is reading this

book has experienced the extreme side of the Great Commission, but some have and they have suffered guilt and shame because of it. In some way, the Church turned an awesome command of love into an instrument of control.

The Great Commission is what people refer to when speaking of Matthew 28:18-20. In this passage, Jesus says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:16-20 [HCSB]). Evangelical Churches say that this command applies to every believer in Christ, yet the context of this passage tells a different story. The following is the whole context:

*The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted* (emphasis added). Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:16-20 [HCSB])

According to what I emphasized in the above passage of Scripture, the Great Commission, as it is called, was directed towards the eleven apostles only. So this means that Jesus’ command to “go” was not for everyone. Also, the apostles understood from Jesus’ command that they were only to share the good news of Jesus with the Jews. They did not go to the Non-Jews until Acts 10, and even then, it was only Peter and then Paul. Christ had to tell

Peter in a dream to start going to the non-Jews. If Christ's original command included the non-Jews, then Peter would have known that and Christ would not have had to tell him many years later in a dream. According to Romans 1:16, the apostles' responsibility was first to the Jews and then to the Non- Jews.

Today, evangelicals push to have the good news broadcasted to the world; according to Paul, this has already been accomplished: "... the gospel that you have heard, which *was proclaimed in all creation under heaven*, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister..." (emphasis added) (Col. 1:23 [NASB]). Whether or not he was referring to Matthew 28:18-20 I do not know, but Paul seems to believe that Christ's command was already fulfilled.

The Clergy use Romans 10:14-17 to promote the Great Commission. They do not go any farther than verse 17 because verses 18 through 21 tell of how the good news had already been sent "to the ends of the world" (Rom. 10: 18 [NIV]). This happened fifty days after the Passover when Peter and the other apostles spread the good news to the Jews gathered at what we call Pentecost. On that day, Peter preached to the Jews from around the world who had gathered at their most holy site, the Temple (Acts 2:5) for one of Judaism's biggest observances, the Festival of Weeks.

Acts 2:5 says that Christ's good news has already been spread throughout the earth: "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews *from every nation under heaven* (emphasis added)" (Acts 2:5 [NIV]). When the Jews went back to their homes, they took the good news with them.

So what about all the people who have been born since the good news was spread all over the world? Should not the Great

Commission still be in force for them as well? The good news “was proclaimed *in all creation*,” according to Paul. Paul could have said “to all creation” but instead said “*in all creation*,” meaning that the good news about God is a part of every generation and visible for all to see. God put enough information about himself in creation so that people know he exists. All people know God exists; they can either desire to know him personally or they can ignore him. God is available as friend and Savior to anyone who wants to know him. Paul wrote about this in Romans 1:

For God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, *since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made* (emphasis added). As a result, people are without excuse. For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. (Rom. 1:18-23 [HCSB])

Some may read Romans 1:18-23 and think that God’s wrath is against people, but it is not. If read closely, Romans 1:18-23 speaks of God’s wrath being *against the godlessness of sin which hides the truth about God’s grace*. Sin covers up the truth of God’s grace and love for his creation. It is against sin, not people themselves, that God’s wrath is directed because sin keeps us from knowing God and being close to him like it did Adam and Eve. God’s wrath was directed towards breaking the power of sin to make it possible for all people to come to him. Thank God the power of sin over us is dead.

Some people will continue to search for the God whose work they see in creation. God does not hide himself from anyone but is apparent to all who see and hear his handiwork. God's good news is for those who see his work in creation and want to know him personally—the good news is that people can now walk with the same great and almighty God who created everything without having to do anything. This does not exempt God's followers from telling other people about why they have hope in living forever with Jesus. God still uses his followers to introduce others to the God they know when asked about him (not to be confused with proselytizing); this is why Peter said, "Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy" (1 Pet. 3:15 [MSG]). God makes his good news available to everyone all of the time.

Of course, people have the freedom to go to other countries to love others with the good news about Christ—if *their consciences tell them to*—this is a good, God-honoring thing to do. God, not a mandate, is the only one who *gently* affects the consciences of his heritage to go, come, or stay. Going around the world to help and love others is a godly and loving thing to do for God's heritage. However, if the Great Commission was for everyone for all time, Peter and the other apostles would have reiterated it to their audiences, but *they did not because Christ's Great Commission had already been fulfilled*. Besides, if everyone went, no one would ever be home to live out the good news among families and friends.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Thinking about the Church's version of the end times can be scary; it is planned that way. I do not believe or imagine for a moment that God's Spirit gives us fear of what might happen because the Scripture says, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7 [NLT]). Christ said, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (Jn. 10:10 [NLT]); some translations say "full" or "abundant life." Jesus did not come to scare us about what might happen; he came to give us peace and a wonderful life no matter what happens.

Eschatology makes people anxious, not peaceful. Those who can make us feel anxious own our emotions and spirits; we are slaves to what they say. Having Christ's Spirit in our lives now prepares us, with all assurance, that he has tomorrow safely in his hands. Jesus said to be concerned with the challenges of today only.

Tomorrow's freedom depends upon how we use and focus on our freedom today. If we continue to worry about what might happen tomorrow, our todays are slaves to our tomorrows.

## 7—The Law of Retention

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**H**ave you ever noticed that everything the Church says you should do revolves around attending it as well as supporting it financially? When Church members do not faithfully support and attend the Church, they are made to feel guilty. Once people have gotten into the habit of going to the Church, they feel guilty when they break the habit. The Church takes advantage of this guilt by insisting that it comes from grieving the Holy Spirit for failing him.

I remember speaking to a retired clergyman who did not feel well one Sunday evening, but when I suggested he stay home and rest, he rejected the idea and said that he did not want to disappoint anyone by missing the evening service. His heart was not in attending, but he went anyway so no one could say that he was not the committed person they thought he was. He was a victim of guilt and fear; if he failed to go to the service, he would feel guilty for not sacrificing his personal needs to be in Church, and he was afraid of what others would say about his lack of commitment to attend Church services no matter what. Besides, as a retired clergyman, he had preached about the lack of commitment of those who do not attend the Church's services regularly.

### **Keep 'Em Coming Back**

The Church employs guilt, shame, and fear to retain its members. These tactics are the means to keep people committed to

attending and supporting the Church financially. Without attendance or money, the Church would not exist.

The Church, particularly the Clergy, defines commitment to God by the things one does for and in the Church. Remember that I have already established earlier that the Church centers on the word “doing.” Pulpits on Sunday mornings deliver forty-five minute sermons about what God will do if you fail to be the kind of Christian you should be. “If you fail to be faithful to God by not attending and financially supporting this Church,” the Church says, “God will be unhappy with you, and he is likely to punish you. To keep this from happening, you should...” Fear of what God might do to people if they fail him is the motivation religion uses to get out of them what it wants.

Guilt and shame are hallmarks of cults. These feelings are generated by a “performance-based mentality.” According to Johnson’s book on cults, “shame is a sense of inferiority, a negative self-assessment, an indictment on your very personhood,” and “the prime motivator of behavior.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the Church’s Clergy say that guilt “is a valuable signal indicating a wrong or bad behavior.”<sup>2</sup> The Clergy uses guilt effectively to get the results it desires. Religion impedes upon people’s consciences to make them feel guilty. People need God’s cure for guilt and shame, not a reminder or reinforcement of these feelings every Sunday morning.

It is easy for the Clergy to use words to make its children, the laity, feel guilty. Take tithing as an example: the Clergy can make people feel guilty about not giving ten percent of their income when they need the money to buy groceries. The Clergy can make people feel guilty about skipping Sunday School to catch up

1 Johnson, 45.

2 Ibid.

on some rest after working late Saturday night. The Clergy can make people feel guilty about staying home to be with family instead of attending services on Sunday evening. The Clergy will say that there are no excuses for not complying with religion's shoulds and musts. They say that not tithing or missing a Church service shows that a person is uncommitted to Christ. The Clergy makes their laity feel guilty when they do not adhere to what the Clergy thinks is right for them.

In his book, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, Johnson implies that only abusive ministers have agendas,<sup>3</sup> but is this so? The agendas of abusive ministers are evident in their drive for personal glory, Johnson believes. However, the Church and its Clergy are in their nature agenda bound; for instance, whether it is unwitting or intentional, the Clergy manipulate others to increase their Church's membership and financial receipts.

Legalism is the force behind religion. Legalism is also an agenda as it seeks to make people conform to the tenets of religion. Even those Churches that claim to be out-of-the-box or contemporary are bound by legalistic efforts to get people to be a part of their Church and religion. All Churches have goals and use prescribed methodologies to carry out those goals.

Agendas are most effective when they are disguised as the Lord's will. The agenda called legalism ensures that the laity consistently suffers from feelings of guilt and shame. Johnson writes, "Legalism is a form of religious perfectionism that focuses on the careful performance and avoidance of certain behaviors. It teaches people to gain a sense of spiritual acceptance based on their performance, instead of accepting it as a gift on the basis of Christ."<sup>4</sup>

3 Ibid., 47.

4 Ibid., 37.

To get people on board with a particular agenda, Clergy may ask questions such as, “What are you going to do for God” or “What have you done for God lately?”

### **The “You Must Go to Church” Verse**

As already discussed, Hebrews 10:25 is the favorite weapon of the Church, but it uses only one portion of this Scripture to press its agenda: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” (NIV). The second half of this verse says: “but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (NIV). The Church misuses this Scripture to get what it wants—membership retention.

The whole point of a family getting together is to enjoy each other’s company. Being part of a healthy family reunion is a great encouragement; it is from this perspective that the writer of Hebrews told his Jewish audience not to give up getting together as a family. A Church service is not a family atmosphere because it separates the family by age and sex, and because it keeps everyone’s attention focused in one direction instead of on each other. Whoever says we go to Church to fellowship has never really taken into consideration what fellowship actually means. Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines fellowship as “companionship.”<sup>5</sup> Sitting silently in a Church service and watching the stage performance is not companionship. Since most of a Church’s congregants are silent spectators in Church, how can the statement, “We go to Church to fellowship,” be true?

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<sup>5</sup> Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1986), s.v. “Fellowship.”

As a point of interest, I have heard some Clergymen try to divide fellowship into two different kinds: informal and formal. Under this rationale, informal fellowship is the kind of familial encounters friends and family have when they get together. Formal fellowship is when people sit in a Church service, facing one way under the direction of the pastor. These Clergymen are obviously stretching the meaning of fellowship to keep their jobs intact and positions legit. They are doing what they can to protect them and their institutions. However, companionship is informal *only* and focuses on closeness and love. How does one go about having formal companionship?

### **Fear of Being Labeled**

People are afraid of the Church because of how it has treated dissenters in the past. Institutionalism is a hungry beast that will stop at nothing to gorge itself on the souls of humanity. The earth, particularly America, is the Church's playground. It bullies and attacks anyone who does not play religion according to its rules. For example, the largest Protestant denomination in America boycotted the *Disney Company* because it did not exemplify the religious morals of the denomination. In this case, the Church tried to punish a non-Christian organization for non-Christian activities.

People seem to be afraid of the Church and what it might say as if it controls whether or not people go to heaven. The Church specializes in vilifying and discrediting dissenters and those who leave it; it labels them *hurt, wounded, lazy, uncommitted, misled, sinful, hot-tempered, un-saved, rebellious, anarchist, anti-Christ, anti-Church, hateful, unloving, troublemaker, independent, unrepentant, heretical, blasphemous, cultic, bitter, angry, arrogant, conceited,*

*vain, sacrilegious, irreligious, ungodly, wicked*, etc. Just like children on a playground, the Church resorts to name-calling when someone disagrees with it. Remember the saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Whenever the Church tries to label you, it only does so because you will not play its religious game by its rules. When the Church can no longer control you, it resorts to name calling.

### **Fear of Being Left Out**

Some people are never quite sure of their standing with God because they get mixed messages from the pulpit. While Churches preach God’s grace, they also imply that people risk God’s anger when they do not strive to please him. Churches leave people in doubt so that they will try a little harder to ensure that they do not make God unhappy with them for not being as committed to him as they should be. Some think that if God gets angry with them for lack of commitment, they will be left out when it is time to go to heaven.

### **Fear of Being in the Poor House**

I am going to cover this a little more in the next chapter, but it deserves mentioning here. You hear from pulpits that if you are not being faithful to God with your finances, he will not bless you financially. Some people tithe their money either to keep calamity from befalling them or to get more money. Either way, the Church has its donors under its thumb as it equates tithing to the Church with love for God.

## How the Law of Retention Works

The Church operates as a matrix with many different parts that work together for a common goal: retention. The Church uses Church attendance, Church services, recruitment or proselytizing, Bible study materials, sermons, money, and even prayer to keep people coming back.

- *Church attendance*: this tops the list. The Church continues to feed regular attendees what it wants them to know. Going to the Church regularly forms a habit, and the guilt that people feel when they miss going keeps them attending it.
- *Church services*: these intend to keep people under the watchful eye of the Church and educate attendees on a regular basis. The Church disapproves of independent gatherings of Church members because they are a threat to the Church's central control. Even when Churches authorize small groups, they use Church-approved trained leaders and materials.
- *Recruitment or proselytizing*: this activity keeps new people coming into the Church to increase the Church's credibility with its denomination and with other Churches. New members mean more revenue.
- *Bible study materials*: these approved materials keep people within a certain paradigm. Designed study materials also keep a Church or denomination on the same page; when everyone is studying the same material, there is less of a chance of dissension. This material also keeps people reliant on the religious publishing companies, which are controlled by the Clergy.
- *Sermons*: the sermon is the focus of the Church service. It is from the pulpit that the Clergy is able to control the doctrinal intake of many people at one time.
- *Money*: the Church needs money to survive, so it stresses heavily that people must give money to God, when in actuality, people are giving their money to the Church to support its corporate structure, Clergy, staff, and expenses.

- *Prayer*: people are taught to talk to God through a particular portal and method—head bowed and eyes closed. Church members are taught to end a prayer in Jesus’ name or God won’t hear the prayer.

Everything the Church does is to increase and retain its membership, stature, and finances. Since the pulpit is the center of the Church, and since the Clergy is essentially the Church, then it is the Clergy who is the beneficiary of all that goes right or wrong in the Church. Because of this, the Clergy directs the Church’s members towards the goals that benefit the Clergy and will do what it can to keep Church members and bring new ones in.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I am closing out this chapter with God’s law of retention. This is what our Lord and God Christ Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and *no one will snatch them out of My hand*. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. *I and the Father are one* (emphasis added)” (Jn. 10:27-30 [NASB95]). God’s law of retention is much different from that of the Church. Once you become a part of God’s lineage, you belong to him, and no one can change that—certainly not the Church or its Clergy.

## **8—Money: The Window to the Soul**

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*“Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body.”<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus taught his disciples in Matthew 6:19-34 that “Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21 [NLT]). In today’s fast paced, money based society, the focus is on material possessions. The media continually bombards us with what retailers say we need to be truly happy and complete.

The Church knows people’s monetary weakness and uses it in its favor. The Church proclaims, “God will bless you if you are faithful to him by giving him tithes and offerings.” Is the money we give to God going straight to God or does it make a detour to a local bank account where it waits to be spent on Church related buildings, Church expenses, and the Clergy? Why would God even want us to give him money when he created it and owns all of it anyway?

People want their material needs in this life met, and I understand that; however, the Church teaches that financial security in this life depends on what one does for God. If what God does for us depends on what we do for God, then God can be bought and paid for. In this case, grace—unmerited favor—has nothing to do with being God’s child, but it has everything to do with how well one performs. I know some wealthy people who are convinced that the reason they are wealthy is that they have been faithful in

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1 Taken from Matthew 6:22, NLT.

tithing and Church attendance. If this is true, then the poor and persecuted people of the world must not be tithing or going to Church.

The Church manipulates people's desire for financial security and uses it to benefit itself greatly. The Church must have money to survive, so it uses whatever means it can to get money and power. No money means that the Church fails and that the Clergy no longer has a platform.

### **Ownership is Nine-Tenths of the Law**

The Church makes its members believe that when they give it money, they are giving their money to God. The Church also makes people believe that when they do not give money to it, they are robbing God. According to the Church, anyone who robs God is “under a curse” (Mal. 3:9 [NLT]). Who wants to risk being cursed by God? The trap of fear is set because no one wants to anger God Almighty by holding back his money.

The next step the Church takes is to give a promise to those who tithe: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!” (Mal. 3:10 [NLT]) The Church owns the people who believe its distortion of the above passage: “If you tithe faithfully to the Church, God will bless you beyond your wildest dreams.” Everyone has needs of some kind and wants financial security; many of these innocently take the Church’s bait—hook, line, and sinker.

## **As Long As People Want Money**

As soon as the mention of receiving more money is uttered, people will give the Church their full and undivided attention. While the Clergy is preaching about tithing and telling people of the financial possibilities of the giver, the Clergy does not guide them to the real truth of the Bible passage on which its sermons are based—Malachi 3:6-12. The first truth is that the original audience of this Bible passage was guilty of oppressing widows and orphans by withholding the tithe (Mal. 3:5). The second truth the Church ignores about Malachi 3:6-12 is that the tithe had only to do with food—produce and animals to feed widows, orphans, and the Levites who had no property and depended on the tithe for their survival (Lev. 27:30-33). The Clergy are not the Levites! The Clergy can get a job unlike the Levites, but because of their sense of entitlement, they do not get one and instead live falsely on the backs of the laity. The true meaning of the tithe is found at the beginning of the verse: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse *so there will be enough food in my Temple*” (emphasis added) (Mal. 3:10a [NLT]). The tithe is food—not money.

The Church attempts to suppress this fact by arguing that the Hebrews did not have a monetary system. This is also untrue, and if God had wanted the Hebrews to tithe money, he would have told them so. God has NEVER told his people to give a tenth of their money to the Temple or the Church. Even to imply that God commands us to give a tenth of our money to the Church is nothing but propagated fallacy to control the innermost sacred part of a person—the soul. If the Church can manipulate people into giving to it, then it will own the givers. The givers continue to give because

they have been led to believe that they are keeping God happy with them and that they are promised financial rewards in return.

The third truth the Church chooses to keep beneath the radar is that the tithe has been abolished because there is no more Temple. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., so were all of the requirements that went along with it. God instituted a new command called “love” (Jn. 13:34-35). Love generates charity, the unmerited benevolence towards others; love does not promote faceless Churches that use a fraction of their resources to provide for people in need.

After Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, there is no more mention in the Bible about tithing. Since God’s temple is now the body of each believer (1 Cor. 6:15a, 18-20; 2 Cor. 6:16), there is no more Temple in which to tithe. Technically speaking, if we had to tithe today, we would tithe to ourselves and to each other since God’s temple is now the body of each believer. This is true Christian charity—giving of food, time, and money to help fellow believers in need—the outflow of love.

According to the New Testament, the money collected among the earliest followers of Christ was only for charity towards poor believers. For instance, the giving mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 all have to do with taking care of the poorest of God’s heritage. The Church explains away this fact because it wants people focused on giving a tenth of their income to it instead of to needy followers of Christ. So the tithe as we know it today is a kind of religious tax imposed on us by the Church government—the Clergy—to support them and keep control over the givers. Whenever money is at stake, lies and misrepresentation

of the truth will abound. The Church is professional at getting what it wants in order to keep it going.

### **The Church is Big Business**

The Church is a billion or even a trillion-dollar yearly religious business which spends most of its money on buildings and supporting the Clergy; very little of it actually goes to love people at home and abroad. Under the guidance of Church leadership, the Church decides what cause or individual is worthy to receive financial assistance. What receives the greatest attention is that which will enlarge the Church's membership. With greater membership come growing bank accounts to use for buildings and hiring more Church staff.

Every year the Church focuses on financial stewardship, whether they call it *giving* or *tithing*. Every so often the Clergy preach on tithing, or what they euphemistically term *stewardship*. They do this for four reasons. The first reason is that like any business, the Church could not function without a steady income. Second, the Clergy wants its pay. Third, the Clergy sees growing financial receipts as proof that its sermons and work in the Church are effective. Fourth, the Clergy needs to have a way to keep people committed and coming back to the Church.

### **All Take and No Give**

The Church is a taker, not a giver. A Church member can faithfully give ten percent of his income, but his entire tithe will never go towards a cause he believes in. Giving money to the Church is like a crap-shoot; one hopes that the money is going to be used for human needs, but it is at the mercy of the Church's leader-

ship and majority as how best to use the tithe money. Individual givers have little or no say in how their tithe money is used by the Church—their say comes in the form of one vote for the thousands of dollars they give.

Another way that giving to a Church is like gambling is that people give and give hoping that God will notice and reward ten times the gift, as they have been promised by preachers at the Church and on television. “Stop robbing God,” the Church says, “and he will open heaven’s financial flood gates and shower money on you.” The Church preaches financial blessings falling on those who tithe and give money regularly and financial damnation on those who rob God of his tithes and offerings. Does God reward based on what people do for him and punish those who fail to give him a tribute?

### **The Eye of the Soul**

Whatever the Church’s reasoning and excuses for giving it money, the end result is control of people’s deepest thoughts: it effectively uses money to control its members. The two recurring themes in the Church are “Come to me” and “Give to me.” Faithful Church attendees are more likely to give money on a regular basis, another good reason to turn people into regular attendees.

Just as a wagon driver controls a mule by dangling a carrot in front of its nose, the Clergy use offers of potential financial blessings to keep people tithing, submitting to them, and going to the Church. People will do most anything for money and the perceived security that is associated with it. The Church’s approach to tithing is fundamentally the same as gambling. The Church promises that God will bless those who give ten percent of their gross income.

Many Churchgoers put this much or more in the offering plate hoping to get one hundred times as much in return.

The Church promises freedom in Christ to the tired travelers of life. When these weary sojourners come to collect the promise of a better life with God, they are given promises that tie faithfulness to God with religious deeds. The Church has meticulously connected walking with God with tithing and financial rewards.

The financial success of the Church is the culmination of a great many years of threatening its members with God's displeasure upon those who do not obey its doctrine to the smallest letter. Threatening someone with financial disaster and physical maladies for not tithing is sure to convince people to give. The desire and need for financial security for one's self and family is used by the Church to keep people committed to giving money to it.

The Church knows that money is the window to the soul; in our society today, people depend on it for survival. Because of our dependence on money for survival, we want to ensure that we have enough by doing all we can to protect our wellbeing. The last thing we need or want is to be on God's bad side and have the little we possess taken away from us. The Church is good at getting us to depend on it for financial security instead of seeking God and asking him to provide for us. Over the years, the Church has coaxed us into donning its rose-colored glasses so that we can see God as it wants us to. Jesus removes them when he said this about our eyes being the windows to our souls:

Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is! No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other;

you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:22-24 [NLT]).

Jesus said, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matt. 6:33 [NLT]). In teaching about Matthew 6:33, the Church says that seeking God’s righteousness includes stewardship—a fancy word for tithing. The Church associates tithing with righteousness because it wants people to believe that giving it money is righteous. In fact, living righteously entails only loving your neighbor as yourself. In this, you are obeying the whole Bible (Matt. 6:19-34; 22:34-40).

Seeking the kingdom of God is not giving money to it. It is putting faith in God that he will take care of you and provide your needs, independent of what you try to do for him. If God feeds the birds and clothes the beautiful flowers of the field without their tithe money, then he will do the same for the most important part of his creation—his heritage. The Church claims to serve God when in reality it serves money; Jesus said that no one can serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24). God’s heritage has no need to worry about the future and its provisions since he is in control every day (Matt. 6:19-34).

God will take care of his heritage because he takes care of his own, period. We do not need to worry about anything because God’s care is not provisional upon what we do for him. Parents do not take care of their children in return for what their children do for them. Righteousness is not doing the Church’s work, attending it, or giving money to it; it is living a life of loving others as you love yourself (Matt. 22:34-40). Charity towards others is an extension

of love. Tithing or giving money to the Church is not charity—it is more like highway robbery.

### **Concluding Remarks: The Golden Rule**

At some time in your life you have probably heard about the Golden Rule. The Scripture does not mention the Golden Rule per se, but it does talk about doing for others what you want them to do for you, which falls under Jesus' command to love. Unfortunately, in real life, the Golden Rule is, "He who has the gold makes the rules."

It is through the passage of time that the Church takes our freedom of conscience and tries to enslave it with religious duties. The Church is a powerful business whose power comes from its wealth. Who wants to dismiss such a powerful organization that claims supremacy over the lives of its members? Who wants to debate an organization that uses its power and influence as if it is God's authority on earth? Religion is not worthy of our worry because it has no power and authority over anyone who chooses not to submit to it.

Because the Church financially and spiritually dominates the Christian landscape, it gets to decide what its members must do to be dedicated Christians. The Church uses the insecurity of people and makes them slaves with chains of fear. The Church and its officials get to make the rules because it is they who have the power of money behind them.

Through fear, the Church tries to take ownership of anyone who has never been shown that God wants only people's love—not their money.



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## 9—Loud Enough and Long Enough

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As I took a break from trying to figure out how to begin this chapter, I mindlessly began to click my way through the Internet when an idea struck me like a bat hitting a ball. I googled Adolph Hitler's saying, "Tell a lie often enough, loud enough, and long enough, and people will believe you." When I typed this quote into a search engine, I was given several choices. The one that caught my eye was a Baptist website developer who specialized in helping ministers and Churches develop successful advertising banner ads for their websites. It so happened that the author of this site is a pastor as well as a web site developer.

In regards to developing purposeful and successful ads for the Church, the author says this:

One of the most important motivations . . . for someone clicking on an ad is trust. And, just like in other areas of life, trust grows from familiarity. The more a prospect sees your ad, the more likely they will be to feel that you have something of value to offer them. Even the wicked understand this concept. Adolf Hitler is famous for saying, "Tell a lie often enough, loud enough, and long enough, and people will believe you." He was right. Governments and political leaders do this all the time, even today, even in our own country. When someone sees your advertisement, they don't know if what your ad says is a lie or the truth. However, the more times they see your ad and your message, the more confidence they will have in it and the more likely they will believe your message. It's a simple fact of human nature: familiarity leads to trust. The more someone sees your message and the more prominently you promote it, the more they will trust it.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Ron Meldrum, "Effective Banner Advertising, Part 1: Why aren't My Banners Pulling?" *Baptist Advance: The How-to Resource for Promoting Baptist Web Sites*. [http://www.baptistadvance.com/issues/Effective\\_Banner\\_Ads\\_01](http://www.baptistadvance.com/issues/Effective_Banner_Ads_01).

What the author said sums up cults, politics, and especially religion. I am sure the author did not intend to draw such a close relationship with religion, cults, and politics, but he did. As with any cult, political party, and politician, the Church tries to place its best foot forward to get people to believe it, support it, and get them into the Church. Cults, politics, and the Church use advertising—a type of propaganda—to their favor to obtain the goals they want accomplished. Most times people will go with what or who they know best rather than something or someone they know little about; many do not know the truth that will set them free in Christ Jesus.

Is there a correlation between a cult and the Church?<sup>2</sup> They both violate people's free consciences. My purpose is not to label or insinuate that those involved with the Church are cultic; however, I wish to point out that it is the Church system, its dogma, methodologies, and leadership positions that are similar in nature to cults. Since my whole topic revolves around the violation of an individual's conscience, I feel it is important to show that the activities we have been subjected to in the Church, under the authority of the Clergy, are not as innocent as we might think. What the Church is and does has everything to do with why so many people seek to leave it and search for peace with God outside of it.

### **A Cult's Purpose**

Everything about a cult is geared to harvest certain results from its members that its leaders desire. The main goal of a cult is control over the lives of its members using manipulation, of which  
 php, accessed December 10, 2007.

2 Keep in mind that there is a difference between the institution called *Church* and God's heritage, which is also called *church*.

guilt and shame play a major role. Spiritual violation is the game cults use to win control over the actions of its targets. If a cult can control the spirit, then the body and emotions will follow. Spiritual violation begins with something seemingly harmless and then usually ends up becoming detrimental for the cult member and his family. Cults use a “bait and switch” methodology to suck people in its vacuum of spiritual slavery.

Churches across the Globe invite people to them by using some form of advertising such as, “Come fellowship with us; we’re a Bible believing congregation who centers on the welfare and strength of families.” Of course, when families get to the Church, they are separated according to age and gender in Sunday School, and they are separated during the religious services into adult and children’s Church in the name of ministry.

Every part of a Church’s religious services is ordered; this is known as a liturgy or an order of worship. The Clergy is trained at how to conduct a Church’s service to produce the right emotions at the right time, such as when to sadden the congregants with sad stories, and to heighten the senses with humor and inspirational stories as well as music. The Clergy is trained in seminary and on-the-job to conduct spiritual services intending to get audiences in a certain frame of mind.

## **Definition of a Cult**

*Traditional Christianity* defines a cult as being comprised of those who deviate from the Church’s government and traditions.<sup>3</sup> A cult, therefore, is “any religious group which differs significantly

3 Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions: The Essential Guide to Their History, Their Doctrine, and Our Response* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 19-21.

in one or more respects as to belief or practice from those religious groups which are regarded as the normative expressions of religion in our total culture.”<sup>4</sup> According to the Church, the true “biblical Christianity” that should be practiced today is what the “Church Fathers” defended in their writings and renderings of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Since when did the “Church Fathers” have the authority to determine what we do today?

People who preach something other than the gospel of the Church are considered cultic.<sup>6</sup> According to the Church, everything it mandates and practices—from tithing to attending Church services—is in the name of the gospel (gospel means “good news”). When a religious group departs from the Church’s version of the gospel, it is labeled a cult.

According to some psychologists, “cults basically have only two purposes: recruiting new members and fund-raising.”<sup>7</sup> Everyone is a target of cults, especially people who are seekers. Cults tend to be seeker-sensitive in their atmosphere and will arrange their programs and activities in such a way that appeals to people.<sup>8</sup>

## Characteristics of a Cult

According to one psychologist, “belief systems of the cults are characterized by closed-mindedness and antagonism on a personal level,” and “... all cultic belief systems manifest Church dogma-

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4 Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults: The Definitive Work on the Subject*, ed., Ravi Zacharias (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 18-19.

5 Ibid., 29-31.

6 Rhodes, 19-21.

7 Margret Thaler Singer, *Cults in Our Midst: The Continuing Fight Against Their Hidden Menace*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 11.

8 Ibid., 23.

tism and intolerance for any position but their own.”<sup>9</sup> I wonder if this psychologist has ever been in the same room with a Baptist and a Methodist when arguing about the proper, biblical mode of baptism.

The following is a list of sociological characteristics of a cult, and I have juxtaposed them with characteristics of the Church:

- Authoritarian-style leadership (one senior pastor)
- Elitist mentality (“Our denomination is the only true Church,” or “Our Church is the only one that is biblical,” and so on.)
- Segregation: separation is based on doctrines and/or nationality. (Baptist, Methodists, Presbyterian, Independent, Catholic, White Churches, Black Churches, Hispanic Churches, liberal Churches, Contemporary, Traditional, etc.)
- Discouraging people to think for themselves. (Most Churches and denominations have their own study material that is either developed by or approved by their leaders. The Clergy wants to ensure that no one is stepping out of their Church’s prescribed dogma and paradigm.)
- Fear of divine retribution (“If I don’t go to the Church or tithe, God will punish me.”)
- Protection from evil (Going to the Church protects us from temptation and heresy.<sup>10</sup>)
- Cults deny the priesthood of the believer.<sup>11</sup> (*The Priesthood of the Believer* is a term meaning that those who follow Christ as their Lord are priests; since Christ’s death and resurrection put an end to the need for a priest to mediate between mankind and God, they no longer need any special office to guide them to God. Protestants proclaim the priesthood of the believer in principle but ignore it in practice as they have specially-called and trained men and women who officially govern. The Church considers a

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9 Martin, 34.

10 Rhodes, 31-34.

11 Ibid., 28.

group of believers in Christ without the Clergy present an unofficial and illegitimate gathering.)

## Characteristics of a Cult Leader

According to *Cults in Our Midst* by Margret Singer, cult leadership is characterized in two different ways: the role of the leader and the relationship between the leader and followers.

The role of the leader is threefold:

- First, “cultic leaders are self-appointed, persuasive persons who claim to have a special mission in life or to have special knowledge.” Remember that Clergy enter into their *office* by the way of a call from God, which is not observable by anyone else.
- Second, “cult leaders tend to be determined and domineering and are often described as charismatic. These leaders need to have enough personal drive, charm, or other pulling power to attract, control, and manage their flocks.” Successful pastors of Churches are generally a combination of “people person,” “in control,” and “hard chargers.”
- Third, “cult leaders center veneration on themselves.”<sup>12</sup> Veneration means reverence; hence the title “reverend.” Even those who do not insist on being addressed by a title do not discourage it either.

The second characterization of cult leadership, according to Singer, is the relationship between the leader and his or her followers.

This characterization manifests itself in three different ways:

- First is the authoritarian nature of a cult’s structure. No matter how a Church tries to structure itself, there is still an authoritarian of some kind running the show. There is always one

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<sup>12</sup> Singer, 8. All of the characteristics in this paragraph come from page 8.

man, woman, committee, or ministry action team the rest of the Church follows.

- Second, “cults appear to be innovative and exclusive. Cult leaders claim to be breaking with tradition, offering something novel, and instituting the only viable system for change that will solve life’s problems or the world’s ills.” One notices that the myriad of worship styles, preaching styles, building styles, and religious movements are shining examples of the innovative and exclusive nature of the Church, especially those who are seeker based.
- Third, “cults tend to have a double set of ethics.”<sup>13</sup>

The Church has a double set of ethics. The advertising, atmosphere, and activities of Churches claim to be seeker-friendly, family-friendly, and visitor-friendly until people become members. When this happens, the Church splits up the family with its programs. After the Church separates a family, it is then free to inundate it with “age appropriate” lessons in Sunday School and “children’s Church;” this creates a never-ending cycle of Church disciples. This is the first action of a totalitarian or communist government—to take over the education and training of children to ensure that it has generations of followers of its particular ideology. The Church is no different.

The Church’s offer of freedom and rest becomes a bait and switch: once a seeker becomes a Church member, the promised freedom changes into a list of things he or she must do to be faithful to God and the Church. The Church controls the spirituality of its members by locking them into a minefield of busyness that prevents them from thinking freely.

Another way the Church can be said to have a double set of ethics is that it prohibits certain activities and amusements in it be-

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13 Ibid., 8-9. This whole list comes from Singer.

cause these would dishonor it. People can smoke in the parking lot, but in the Church they cannot; people can watch a movie with foul language in it at home, but in the Church they cannot; spouses can argue and fight at home, but in the Church they cannot; people can get drunk at home, but in the Church they cannot; the list goes on and on. The point is to show you that being in the Church is different from being at home or with friends. By having a double set of standards in a centralized weekly meeting place, the Church encourages and even forces people to live double lives. Even though the Church preaches that believers should live for God 24/7, it has created the environment for rampant hypocrisy and double ethical standards within its walls.

### **The Cultic Leadership Model**

Cults base their leadership on a hierarchical model of leadership. The supposed benefits of having a hierarchical cultic leadership are that it “aids spiritual growth,” “provides counsel,” and “gives protection.”<sup>14</sup> Cults hold that God delegated his authority to people he has specially chosen. As such, it is taught that rebellion against the leadership is a sin. The cure for rebellion and sin is to obey the cult leaders because only they have the credentials to guide the group and keep them free from wrong doctrine and subversive ideas.

Cult leaders apply and misuse the so called “five-fold ministry of the Church,” which many claim is found in Ephesians 4:11—a passage used to justify the existence of ministry positions in the Church—to obtain and retain authority over their flocks. Some

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<sup>14</sup> Agnes C. Lawless, and John W. Lawless, *The Drift into Deception: The Eight Characteristics of Abusive Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Resources, 1995), 115-17.

cults teach, “Unity comes through submission to the elders . . .”<sup>15</sup> Christian psychologists believe that people who do not support the Clergy as mentioned in the five-fold ministries of the Church are cultic and Clergy-haters.<sup>16</sup> The Clergy does not need any assistance from cults to make it out to be villainous and an object of scorn; it is good at bringing derision upon itself.

The Clergy misuses the *alleged* five-fold ministry of the Church by creating positions where there need not be any. According to the Clergy, the five-fold ministry comes from Ephesians 4:11 and states that the Church has five leadership positions that help believers to mature: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. What the Clergy refers to as positions or offices are really equipping abilities or gifts Christ gave to all of his followers to encourage each other to grow spiritually; these gifts are familial in nature—not positional.

According to Paul, all of Christ’s followers are given one or more of these gifts to encourage each other. These gifts do not give power over others; they come from Christ’s Spirit to empower the spiritual gifts in others. The Clergy, however, sees these abilities as God’s approval for positions of power. The following is the context of Ephesians 4:11:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. . . . And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the

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15 Ibid., 213.

16 Martin, 43.

trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4:7, 11-16 [NASB])

## **A Cult's Specialty: Brainwashing and Thought Reform**

Cults specialize in brainwashing or thought reform. If a cult member can get a foot inside someone's door, he or she will begin a full-court press to try to capture a potential member's spirit. You probably have experience with two of the most notable cults who go from door to door to get members and distribute their religious material. Again, I have juxtaposed the eight different methods used by cults to control their proselytes with similar methods used by the Church:

- *Protected and controlled environment*: A cult's leader(s) ensures that a certain protocol is established and enforced for any meetings. (The Clergy uses a liturgy, or order of worship, along with unspoken rules [e.g., don't talk, don't sleep, don't play around] to keep the Church's service running smoothly and by the numbers. The liturgy enables the Clergy to prevent anything that would diminish the effect of the Church's services on its members. All aspects of the liturgy are staged to put the Church's members into the particular frame of mind the Clergy desires.)
- *Unique religious vocabulary*: Each cult has its own unique religious terms or unique understandings of religious words. (The Church has its own unique "Churchy" words that only dedicated Church members know. Every type of Church and denomination also has religious words that are subjective to their brand. For example, charismatic Christians use the term "slain by the Spirit," Catholics go to "confession," and Baptists have their "born-again, baptized believers.")

- *Doctrinal purity*: a cult will not deviate from its prescribed beliefs. Its materials are always congruent with its leadership's authority. (Many, if not most, Churches and denominations either have their own Bible study material, buy it from an approved source, or have the Clergy approve Bible study topics, teachers, and Bibles.)
- *Open confession*: Cults encourage open confession and insist upon a system of accountability. (The Church has accountability groups such as Sunday School, prayer meetings, Bible studies, and gender-based spiritual accountability groups.)
- *Preeminence of the religion and its doctrine over the lives of its members*: A cult insists that its rules and routines are the standard operating procedures and that anyone who does not obey them is unfaithful to the cult. (In the 1990's, there was a major Evangelical denomination that boycotted *Disney*. Although I was a member, I took my wife and kids to *Disney*. When I came back with a *Disney* T-shirt, I was stared down for going. I was considered disloyal to this denomination for going against their boycott. I have also been to many meetings where the speakers taught that this denomination's members were to be faithful and true to its statement of faith. The grounds for Churches and people being expelled from this denomination are failing to uphold the guidelines for what it says constitutes a true Church.)
- *The leader's position*: The cult leaders' call and position give him or her authority and spiritual wisdom to lead and guide the sheep. (The Clergy enters into the ministry by the way of a "call" that cannot be heard or observed by anyone else. It is from this call that the Clergy promote its office and authority to "lead, teach, rebuke, and correct" *God's sheep*. Some are more vocal than others when it comes to defending their right to be in charge of the sheep. This call usually demands some kind of reverence from the Church's members; listen some time to how the Church's members address the Clergy with terms of honor such as *doctor*, *reverend*, and *pastor*.)
- *Elitist mentality*: Each cult believes that it is the only official and legitimate religion; all of the others are imitators. (Some denominations and Churches adhere to the belief that only *they* truly represent God and the Bible; those who do not belong to

their Church are not believers and are headed to hell. Also, this mentality seems to be “my Church is better than your Church, so come to mine.”)

- *“Mystical manipulation:* The [cultic] group manipulates members to think that their new feelings and behavior have arisen spontaneously in this new atmosphere. The leader implies that this is a chosen, select group with a higher purpose. Members become adept at watching to see what particular behavior is wanted, learning to be sensitive to all kinds of cues by which they [can] judge and alter their own behavior. Cult leaders tell their followers, “You have chosen to be here. No one has told you to come here. No one has influenced you.”<sup>17</sup> (I have heard pastors say, “The Lord is in this place;” “We are here in the Lord’s House today because we love the Lord and have chosen to be here;” “The Lord is moving in our midst today.” A favorite misapplied call to worship in Church is from Psalms 122:1 “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’ ([NLT]). These statements have evolved from sermons that equate Church attendance with love for God. They also gloss over the work that has gone into controlling the atmosphere of the Church services with liturgy and staged emotions. A Church’s service is designed by professionals to direct the emotions and actions of the congregants in the direction the Clergy desires. The spiritual emotions in Church services have been prearranged by the Clergy to appear as if they are spontaneous—this is mystical manipulation; an excellent tool of control that is taught in seminary.)

Everything in a Church service is geared to harvest a particular response. For instance, there is usually “special music” before the sermon. The intention behind it is to get the audience into a proper frame of mind to receive the sermon. When the service first starts, there will be praise and worship music to get everyone pumped up. When the giving time comes, there will be music about tithes and offerings. When the end of the service comes, there will be an invitation hymn at the sermon’s conclusion so people will respond.

<sup>17</sup> Singer, 69-74.

All of this subtle manipulation is considered acceptable in Church. The Church's leadership takes classes and reads books to learn how to set the mood of its services. I know that people can have true spontaneous joy and good feelings in Church; however, Church services are designed by seminary-trained professionals through years of trial and error *to enhance the worship experience*. The Church continually searches for and tries new methods to get people inside its doors.

Atmosphere is everything in Church services. This is a coy and manipulative way to make people think they need weekly worship; Church services are designed to pump up the members until the next Sunday service. In this way, the Church keeps people dependent on its services and its leaders for spiritual enhancement. The emotions of a Church service can be as addicting as a drug, making people feel as if they need the next Sunday service.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Beyond the clinical characteristics of a cult, the Church's definition of a cult seems to be *any group or individual that does not adhere to traditional Christianity and its doctrine and does not fall within the accepted guidelines of traditional Christianity*. Of course, the Clergy has always controlled traditional Christianity.

There is a difference between the Church's tradition and the Bible. Those who challenge the Clergy and its Church are not challenging God; they are challenging nothing but men and their superficial power over people. Accepted, unchallenged spiritual authority brings about recurring spiritual disasters like the Spanish Inquisition and hundreds of years of official control.

It seems as if the Church tries hiding its own cultic nature and traditions by highlighting those of other religions. It aims to cast dissenters in a poor light, yet, as it points a finger at dissenters and labels them cultic, it has three fingers pointing back at it. Power and prestige are at stake, and as history shows, the Church and the Clergy will do what it takes to keep them. When a lie is told often enough, loud enough, and long enough, people will believe it as gospel truth.

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## 10—The Quest For the Holy Grail

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People are hungry for the authenticity of God. They search high and low and try to find peace with God down many different avenues. Some try escaping from the Church by trying new religious fads. Others try various denominations and Churches to find the one that suits their need to know God personally. Still others try to find a relationship with God by participating in different worship styles. The Church classifies these people as “seekers.”

Remember Roger Williams from Chapter One? During his lifetime, Williams tried at least four denominations. He could never quite fit into any one denomination or Church because they never satisfied his longing to know God, so he ended up being just a “seeker.” He went from Anglican to Separatist to Baptist to a simple seeker looking for God in the confines of human religion.<sup>1</sup> Later in life Williams said, “if my soul could find rest in joining unto any of the [Churches] professing Christ Jesus now extant, I would readily and gladly do it.”<sup>2</sup> When Williams died in the Seventeenth Century, he still had not found a Church that delivered the joy and freedom in Christ he so desired.

### **Closer to Home**

I started searching for God by taking Church courses about how to have a mind like Christ, how to experience God, and how

1 H. Leon McBeth, *A Source Book for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 124-32.

2 Ibid., 132.

to find God's will for my life. My search for God sent me to seminary and compelled me to pastor a Church; these things left me feeling even emptier than when I began. What was I to do? I resigned my pastorate, got involved in a local Church back home, yet I still felt empty. Maybe I was lost and had not really been saved since I was baptized at seven years old. So I had my dad re-baptize me. I asked Jesus to come into my heart over and over again, but I still felt empty. I gave God everything I had, tithed above and beyond the required ten percent, attended the Church every Sunday and mid-week service, taught a boys group, a Sunday School class, had quiet time, read the Bible, had devotion time with my family, and did everything else I was taught that would bring me closer to God. I was still empty.

I took several twelve-week, spiritual enhancement study courses and witnessing classes in my life to fill my spiritual cup, but they succeeded only in emptying my pockets. I began to reconsider all these courses that were supposed to bring me closer to God but instead loaded me down with busyness. All the courses I took had one big thing in common: they required me to purchase books, materials, and be in attendance. "As usual," I thought, "someone is going to profit from my desire to get close to God." I asked myself, "Why should I have to take a twelve-week study course to find God and what he wants me to do?"

Other questions kept nagging at me. Why was I looking for God in Church? Why was I depending on sermons and programs to find out what God wanted of me? I realized that the reason I did these things was that I had been led to believe that the Church had the answers for life's questions. Then the lights came on in my mind, and I began to search.

I learned that trying to get answers from the Church is costly, but I soon discovered that answers from God are free. I asked God to help me, and he did, but it was not the kind of help of which the Church and its keepers approved. God led me out of the Church and into a lonely desert for a time of learning and reflection.

When I left the Church, I quit seeking conventional spiritual wisdom, went to my perfect Father, and sought only his counsel from then on. I took nothing with me to the desert except my willingness and determination to know God and be taught by him alone. My time in the desert is not over as I go back continually so that God may feed me and give me his water that will never leave me thirsty for human spiritual leadership again.

As a disciple of Christ, my journey to the desert has not always been a safe ride as I am still approached by those pretending to be my spiritual benefactors. These people maintain that they have my best interests at heart, but the truth is quite different. Relatives and friends have sent me letters and have even cornered me during my journey away from the Church. As I discovered, the Church treated me like a heretic who had deposited God's "call" on my life in a dung heap. If I had to do my life over, I would go through my journey away from the Church over and over again because I found the peace that passes all understanding in the arms of my heavenly Father.

### **Jesus the "Dissenter"**

It is a historical and biblical fact that the religious establishment goes to great effort to discredit anyone who challenges its Clergy and status. The Jewish religious establishment of Jesus' day tried its best to make Jesus and his followers look like a fringe cult.

The religious leaders wanted to make themselves seem good and holy by trying to make Jesus and his disciples appear evil. Jesus offered freedom from the religion promoted by those leaders; since this threatened them, they resorted to insults and persecution. What happens in the Church is no different.

Jesus was called cultic by the religious leaders of his day because he was disrupting the power structure of the religious leaders. New Testament Scripture passages will show you how Jesus was treated by the Clergy of his day. This following passage records Jesus' response to them: "For John didn't spend his time eating and drinking, and you say, 'He's possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners'" (Matt. 11:18-19 [NLT])!

The Pharisees said that Jesus' work was done in the name of the prince of demons (Matt. 12:22-24). The Jews said that Jesus was possessed by a demon (Jn. 8:48, 52). Jesus told his followers to expect the same from religious people today who do not like the freedom you have and feel threatened because of it:

Students are not greater than their teacher, and slaves are not greater than their master. Students are to be like their teacher, and slaves are to be like their master. And since I, the master of the household, have been called the prince of demons, the members of my household will be called by even worse names! 'But don't be afraid of those who threaten you.' (Matt. 10: 24-26a [NLT])

For 1,900 years, the Clergy has been misleading its laity until both the laity and the Clergy believe what the Church Fathers propagated at the start of the Church age in the Second Century. The ruse began when only the Clergy had the education to read

the Scriptures and had the power to keep them out of the laity's hands. By the time the laity finally had their copies of Scripture, the propaganda of the Church had become truth because for the last 1,900 years, the Clergy has positioned a veil between the laity and the truth. Most of the laity sees nothing but what the Clergy wants them to see.

### **The Un-Comfort Zone**

Most people spend a lifetime searching for peace with God because they do not know that it is easily within their reach. Unfortunately, the place people start searching for God is in the Church. The Church hosts a myriad of programs and studies that it claims will direct people closer to God, but when these Church programs and studies are over, spiritual emptiness seems to creep back into their hearts in a short time. The Clergy suggests this book or that class to help, but these seekers always seem to end up where they started—empty and still searching. Revivals come and go and never seem to last more than three or four weeks.

When the Church fails to provide the clear answers people seek, they begin a search for God through other programs and Churches. This search also leads to a dead end, as Roger Williams discovered 300 years ago.

### **Concluding Headlines: Hot off the Press! The Holy Grail Discovered!**

As the knights of yesteryear searched for the Holy Grail to obtain immortality, people desperately search for it within the walls of the Church. They are led to drink from a Church relic that promises peace and life yet can never satisfy. As a result, people

keep going back to the Church hoping to get at last the drink from its cup that promises to quench their spiritual thirst, but each time they go, they receive its cup of deeds and requirements—like salt to a person dying of thirst.

Jesus' invitation to people is quite different. For those of us who are tired from the religious run-around in a quest for peace with God, Jesus invites us to come to him for a drink of water that will never make us thirsty again (Matt. 11:28-30; Jn. 4:13-14). Jesus has a cup waiting just for us to drink from that does not involve the Church, the Clergy, or religion of any kind. Once we have tasted the water from Jesus' cup, he promises we will not want or need any other. Moreover, the water only Jesus can give will create in us a bubbling wellspring of his life that will spill over into the lives of others.

For any who are ready to be done with the Church, institutionalism, its stringent requirements, and its officials, Christ has an invitation for everyone that can never come from any Church or human leadership. To have God's freedom, all anyone has to do is accept God's gift of true freedom, and God will take it from there.

## 11-An Invitation Church Can Never Give

I love being invited over to a friend's house for fellowship. I like to go visit and hang out over a good and simple meal. I would feel used and disappointed if a friend invited me over to fellowship and then sprung a multi-level marketing presentation on me and the other guests.

For me, going to the Church to meet with God and get to know him better but then receiving lectures about religious obligation and duty became a big disappointment. All I have ever wanted was fellowship and community with other people without having to jump through some kind of religious hoops to do it. When finally I left the Church, I felt like I was leaving a high-pressured, religious multi-level marketing organization. With every Church meeting, I felt like the Church was prompting me to buy into its religious product of duty and then recruit others to come to it as well.

When I left the Church that one Sunday morning after Sunday School, I set off to meet the Lord and get to know him. I had no idea what to do; I had a seminary degree, had pastored a Church, and served in the Church, but I had no idea where I was and where I was going. I decided to trust in God, despite the fear I had about leaving the Church.

I just threw up my hands at trying to do anything for God and began to live day by day. I craved spiritual freedom and intimate knowledge of my Creator; I have not been disappointed.

God offers true freedom to everyone. He invites all people to come and be taught by him personally. This invitation to freedom does not include going to or depending on the Church, the Clergy, or doctrines. The following Jeremiah passage taken from the Bible says this to those who crave to know God personally:

“This is the brand-new covenant that I will make with Israel when the time comes. I will put my law within them—write it on their hearts!—and be their God. And they will be my people. They will no longer go around setting up schools to teach each other about God. They’ll know me firsthand, the dull and the bright, the smart and the slow. I’ll wipe the slate clean for each of them. I’ll forget they ever sinned!” God’s Decree. (Jer. 31:33-34 [MSG])

The passage speaks of the New Covenant God would make with humanity with the coming of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> This New Covenant would no longer require that teachers educate us about God because God himself would be our teacher and guide. We can enjoy living the New Covenant now with the Lord as our only leader, teacher, and parent.

The more we understand God’s new covenant with humanity, the more we will begin to see that the Church represents a complex religious system that centers on its officers. The difference between what the Church offers and what Christ offers is this: the Church offers methods, rules, rituals, and routines all taught in a classroom, taught by the Clergy, to keep learners in God’s good graces; Christ offers complete freedom from them all which is terrifically good news.

The following is Jesus’ invitation to everyone who is worn down by the Church and its religion of “doing”:

1 Even though God said *Israel*, he was including everyone who believed in Christ by faith as a child of Abraham. Read Galatians chapter 3 for a more in depth look.

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (Matt. 11:28-30 [NLT]).

The classic understanding of the above passage was of an experienced ox—Jesus—hooked up to an inexperienced ox—an individual believer—plowing through the dirt of life. It is true that Jesus is with us every step of the way in this life since he will never leave us nor forsake us (Jn.14:16-17; Heb. 13:5), but the above passage of Scripture is not speaking of yoking experienced oxen with inexperienced ones. What Matthew 11:28-30 refers to what the Jews would have understood about when a rabbi calls the students he chooses to be taught by him. Jesus’ offer of rest is to those burdened with following religious rules. As a matter of fact, this invitation is also to those people today who are worn out by the constant effort to make the grade of the Church. If you simply want to know God in a personal way without having to meet all the religious requirements the Church says you must, then Christ’s invitation is for you. What follows this paragraph explains Jesus’ invitation.<sup>2</sup>

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2 How did I come to my conclusion about Matthew 11:28-30? I studied the history behind what was written in the Bible. There is a reason for Jesus’ invitation that comes directly from the Jewish context. Many confusing or mis-applied meanings of New Testament passages can be better understood if we look at the history and culture of those who wrote what they did. Of course, some may get so carried away with the exactness of Bible exposition that they make intellectualism their god and ignore God’s Spirit.

## Following the Rabbi

Since Christ's invitation and message to humanity were first given to the Jews (Jn. 4:22), let us explore the Jewish understanding of Matthew 11:28-30.

All Jewish boys in Jesus' time had to learn the Torah (613 biblical laws of the Pentateuch). When a Jewish boy's Torah education was completed, the rabbi would decide if the boy was astute enough to continue on to the next phase of education.<sup>3</sup> A great number of the boys were rejected for further training by rabbis because they did not have the intellectual ability to continue on with the more rigorous religious training. Besides memorizing the Torah, they had to learn the oral laws and traditions as well.<sup>4</sup>

When Jesus said, "Come to me" in Matthew 11:28, he said what every Jew of his time would understand. Jewish rabbis would call, or in a more understandable term, invite intellectually gifted young men to study under them. To study under a rabbi also meant to follow him. The Jews called those studying and training under the tutelage of a rabbi *talmidim*—plural for *talmid*, which means *disciple* or *scholar*,<sup>5</sup> one who completely dedicates himself to and immerses himself in a certain discipline. In Jesus' day, *talmidim* would literally immerse and wash themselves—what people call baptism—when they committed to follow and study under

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3 Follow the Rabbi, "Rabbi and Talmidim."

4 Unfortunately, women could not be a *talmid* of a Jewish rabbi; however, Jesus did the unthinkable by crossing the social lines of the First Century and inviting women to be his *talmidim*, too. By doing this, Jesus freed the women who had been enslaved by society and religion.

5 Laird R. Harris, "Talmid," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980. Reproduced in *WORDsearch 7: Thompson Chain Reference Bible, Leaders Library's Edition*. CD-ROM. Austin: WORDsearch, Corp, 2004.

a rabbi. Judaism's Mishnah "attributes to Ezra a decree that each male should immerse himself before praying or studying."<sup>6</sup> No one helped a person under water like baptizing preachers do today; it was a self-immersion signifying a voluntary decision to become a talmid. The word talmid has a much fuller meaning than what we understand as disciple today.<sup>7</sup>

When a Jewish young man would accept his master's call to follow him, he would take his master's yoke. Accepting a rabbi's yoke as one's own meant the talmid bound himself to his rabbi until his training was completed; the yoke signified that the talmid would do everything his master did as well as anything else that was required of him, which was an extremely difficult and tedious life of training.<sup>8</sup> The young Jewish man would follow his rabbi and imitate him. As the Jewish rabbi-in-training would grow in his master's abilities, he would then become a rabbi, a master and teacher of the Jewish religion, and train talmidim of his own.<sup>9</sup>

Some specially gifted rabbis would continue on to be masters of the masters and would have the authority to make interpretations of Scripture. As God Almighty and as a Jewish rabbi, Jesus had the authority not only to make interpretations, but to write

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6 Ron Moseley, "The Jewish Background of Christian Baptism." Arkansas Institute for Holy Land Studies. <http://www.haydid.org/ronimmer.htm> (accessed November 26, 2007).

7 The Jews did not have a special name for what we call discipleship today. There was no talmidship; either a person was a talmid, or he was not. Being a talmid was a 24/7 proposition as he would be at the rabbi's side and command all of the time.

8 Follow the Rabbi. "Rabbi and Talmidim." <http://community.gospel.com.net/Brix?pageID=2753>. (accessed June 29, 2007).

9 Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, ed. "Teacher," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992. Reproduced in *WORDsearch 7: Thompson Chain Reference Bible, Leaders Library's Edition*. CD-ROM. Austin, TX: WORDsearch, Corp, 2006.

Scripture as well.<sup>10</sup> The Jewish leaders and Pharisees did not appreciate this Rabbi changing their religion and interpretations of the Scripture and did what they could to discredit him.

The most pious and dedicated young men, known as the Pharisees, came from the ranks of the specially gifted rabbis. The Pharisees, or separate ones, knew the oral traditions<sup>11</sup> attached to Scripture, allowing them to be in a position of leadership among the less educated Jews.<sup>12</sup> The Pharisees and other religious leaders used their position and knowledge to create and maintain control over the lowly Jews, or what would today be called the laity.

What comprised the main instruction for the Jewish laity was the oral tradition devised by the Pharisees, which, naturally, benefited the Pharisees (Matt. 23:1-13). The Jewish laity had no choice but to accept the religious leaders' teachings because they controlled the Scriptures and oral traditions (Matt. 23:2-3). Jews of that day dared not oppose the religious leaders because they would be expelled from the synagogue and Jewish life (Jn. 9:22). As Christ's talmidim we are freed from such obligations and requirements.

Jesus' invitation of Matthew 11:28-30 is especially applicable for us today. Jesus has made himself available to teach us personally and to give us rest from the burdens of following the rules of the Church and its Clergy. Jesus' invitation extends to all people who are worn out by or just cannot make the grade of the Church. If you simply want to know God in a personal way without having

10 Follow the Rabbi, "Rabbi and Talmidim." Jesus is a divinely unique rabbi. As God Jesus needed no formal education, he was never a talmid, and neither did he have any formal education. For more information about Jesus' training, see Jn. 7:15.

11 The oral law or traditions were extra-biblical laws that the pious Jews used to ensure they would never again break God's written laws found in the Torah of the Bible.

12 Follow the Rabbi, "Rabbi and Talmidim."

to fulfill all the religious requirements the Church says you must, then Christ's invitation is for you.

### **An Invitation Like No Other**

Jesus, our Lord and God, invites all people who are tired of religion to his side. Christ's invitation is for us to come to *him*—not to Church, Clergy, or religion.

As Christ's talmidim, we do not need the Clergy; we have the benefit of his Spirit guiding and teaching us (Jn. 14:15-31). Christ's talmidim were with him 24/7; wherever he went, they went, and whatever he did, they did. To be a talmid is to be willingly immersed into your Teacher by the invitation and authority of the Teacher. Being washed and immersed into Jesus' name means one is accepting Christ's yoke and will follow him no matter what happens. Being a talmid of Christ is an everyday way of life, not a Sunday night meeting called Discipleship Training.

I remember one of my sons telling me, "Daddy, I want to do everything you do and go everywhere you go." In some way, form, or fashion, all three of my sons have said the same thing—that they wanted to be like their daddy. Children are much like talmidim in that they want to be like their parents. Children are immersed into their parents; they pick up their good and bad habits, act like them, and talk like them.

A talmid becomes a child of the rabbi he or she aspires to emulate. Anyone who desires to follow Christ Jesus becomes his talmid and matures until that day he or she sees him in person. Christ continues to teach us through his Spirit, not from the mouths of men; sermons are the Clergy's word not God's. Since the Bible contains all the teachings we need to know, and since God is our

Teacher, then we do not need hired human teachers and intermediaries called the Clergy.

To be like the great Rabbi, we must be taught by him alone, not by a hired hand. When things get bad in the Church, or when enticed by more money, the Clergy—the hired hand—either gets fired or moves on to greener pastures. The Clergy are the first ones to abandon the sheep with a resignation when things get bad. There is no substitute for Jesus; he is our only Rabbi and Teacher (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 23:8-12). Thankfully, we have the life, words, and deeds of Christ recorded for us in the first four books of the New Testament; we can read for ourselves and decide with Christ's direction—not the Clergy's—what we are to do as his talmidim.

As it is now, Church members are trained and led by the Clergy, who use materials that they or other Church officers devise to teach Church members. As a result, the theology and doctrine of Church members mirror whatever the Clergy teaches. A Church and its members eventually resemble the person who leads them. The nuclear family is a perfect example of this: children begin reflecting their parents' attitudes, habits, and language, and spouses begin to share common traits because they live together. When believers allow the Clergy to lead them, they eventually become a mirror image of the Clergy.

Christ knew students end up being like their teacher. Christ is our only Teacher, and he is the only one worthy of emulation. "A [talmid] is not above his [rabbi], nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the [talmid] to be like his [rabbi], and the servant like his master" (Matt. 10:25a [NIV]). Rabbis, or teachers, had the job of instruction, but since our only Rabbi is Christ, he teaches us

through his Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Another reason that the Clergy's teaching cannot substitute for Christ's leadership is if the Clergy was the true teacher (rabbi) of Christ's talmidim, then those talmidim would be the true disciples of the Clergy—not disciples of Christ.

As children resemble their parents, Jesus' talmidim begin to resemble him and are visibly noticeable to those around. Have you ever been told that you look like your father or mother? What a compliment when people tell us that we resemble Jesus! The Jewish leadership thought Peter and John resembled Jesus: "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13 [NIV]). When a person is immersed into Christ, he or she will begin to look and act like him—not like the Clergy.

### **A Promise of Rest**

Jesus' invitation for peace and rest is for anyone who is tired of religion, the Church and its officers, and the requirements that go along with them. Christ's invitation is gentle and non-threatening and is extended to everyone, but it is especially for those who are worn down by religion. By accepting Jesus' yoke to learn from him, you will begin to see the freedom he spoke of in John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (NIV). You no longer have to worry about doing Church right because you now depend on Christ's gentle and humble Spirit to lead and teach you. As a result, you will have the rest and peace that an eternity of doing Church cannot give. If you are looking for rest for your spirit

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<sup>13</sup> Complacency is the prime reason people do not check on the validity of what Clergy teach. It is also brought on by years of clerical control.

and for peace with God, Christ's yoke is easy and his expectations are light—a claim the Church cannot make.

Reread the following passage and hear Christ inviting you to enjoy rest and peace from all that threatens to control your spirit: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (Matt. 11:28-30 [NLT]). Jesus' yoke is for anyone who wants to be free. The called-out are those who have accepted Christ's call (invitation) to experience rest and peace with God.

### **Concluding Remarks: Accepting Christ's Invitation**

Accepting Christ's invitation to be led and taught by him is simple and does not require a plan, guide, or a fifteen-page booklet to understand it. It takes only the willingness on your part to decide to follow him alone. Acts 2:38 tells how: “Change your [minds], and each one of you must be [washed] by the authority of Jesus the Messiah, so that your sins may be forgiven. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (SEB). To change your mind means to decide intentionally to follow Christ only; you are also depending upon what Christ has done for you and will do for you instead of what you, the Church, or the Clergy is able to do. A believer in Christ can follow only one person—Christ. To follow Christ is to be his talmid—not the Clergy's. The Clergy will manage to disappoint their laity, but Christ will not.

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## 12—Conclusion: The Wind of Change

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In his controversial and popular book, *Revolution*, George Barna sparked a firestorm of debate and criticism from the Church. To give you a little history, George Barna performs religious based surveys for the Church. An example of his surveys might be a poll of how many Church members goes to Sunday School and worship services and how many go only to the worship services or only to Sunday School. In the past, he has been a hero and darling of the Church because he wrote books based on these surveys, usually revolving around Church growth.

*Revolution* received great criticism from the evangelical and theological elite because it challenged the Church. Although this book is based on Barna's research into the trends of spirituality in America and beyond, the Church attempts to discredit him because he is not a seminary-trained theologian.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, the Church overlooked this "shortcoming" when he was writing books that favored and promoted it.

In *Revolution*, Barna writes about the trend of believers leaving the Church. He calls those believers who no longer "do Church" revolutionaries. According to the president of a seminary representing the largest Protestant denomination in America, "These high-demand Christians represent a threat to the established church."<sup>2</sup>

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1 R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Revolution in the Making?" Commentary by R. Albert Mohler. Obtained from [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_print.php?cdate=2006-02-13](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_print.php?cdate=2006-02-13) (Accessed 26 May, 2007).

2 In essence, a revolutionary is one who no longer depends on the Church for his or her companionship with God.

Why would a seminary president make such a claim? The Church is losing control over the souls of people and is scared it is losing its position of power over people's lives. People no longer feel as if the Church is relevant to their spiritual wellbeing and are seeking God in other ways rather than going to a centralized location to watch a "show" that has no bearing on real life. Barna says that such people no longer have any "use for churches that play religious games."<sup>3</sup>

According to Barna, most American citizens are "mired in an agonizing revolving door of trial-and-error in a disheartening and unfulfilling search for truth, integrity, meaning, wholeness, connection, passion, and inner peace."<sup>4</sup> This reminds me of Roger Williams' search to find that Church that finally would fulfill his deepest desire to know God and fellowship with him in a father-child relationship.

People no longer feel that the Church has anything to offer besides religious rules and routines; people want freedom from them. These sentiments start early in young adults. Barna conducted a study that 16 to 29-year-old people "exhibit a greater degree of criticism toward Christianity than did previous generations when they were at the same stage of life."<sup>5</sup> According to his research, only sixteen percent of non-Christians in their late teens and twenties have "a good impression of Christianity."<sup>6</sup> The Christian group that was critiqued the hardest by this young generation was the evangelicals. Only three percent of this age group viewed evangelicals favorably.

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3 George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 13.

4 Ibid.

5 George Barna, *A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity*, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=280>; accessed Feb. 12, 2008.

6 Ibid.

What was most disturbing was the fact that even young professing Christians viewed the Church and Christianity in a poor light and as being unchristian.<sup>7</sup>

## **Leaving the Church**

Many people who love God and want a deeper relationship with him are circumventing the Church and going straight to him for the freedom he offers. They are bypassing the Church and are living their free lives to the fullest. Does the Church help these people? No, it does what it can to retain control over of these believers' spirituality. Instead of letting people follow Christ as their consciences tell them to, the Church continually loads them down with religious programs and tries to call it freedom in Christ. It makes those people feel guilty for not doing Church and going along with it.

Like a dam bursting from the weight of water pushing on it, the Church can no longer contain people who want something real and fulfilling. People who have had enough of soul violation are recognizing in droves that there is more to walking with God than what the Church offers. These people are the ever-growing landscape of spiritually and emotionally tired people who are seeking rest. They no longer fear the Church's warnings to them; their craving for something more than doing Church is greater than any fear they have of the Church's ostracism should they leave it.

Christ's message of freedom completely changed the face of the earth and religion. Christ's message was not violent, but it changed religion forever because he gave people hope beyond the confines of religion and its buildings. Christ called anyone who listened to

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7 Ibid.

follow him. Christ's call led people away from religion and its leaders, so those leaders had him murdered.

The Church does not like the changes that are happening and have been happening since Christ walked the earth. This is what Christ said about changing the face of religion forever: "Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. 'I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household!'" (Matt. 10:34-36 [NLT]). Christ was not starting a military campaign; he used the sword as a metaphor to predict the conflict and bitterness his followers would experience at the hands of religion, its leaders, and relatives. Unfortunately, wars result from religious groups trying to force their way of thinking on others; "holy wars" are nothing new in "Christianity."

We cannot join a revolution because it is not a thing, place, movement, or Church. What George Barna called the *Revolution* may give people the idea that we are fighting the religious Goliath. The word *Revolution* in itself depicts war and fighting against something or someone to be free of tyranny. It would be easy for some to take the word *revolution* and turn it into another militant religion and denomination. However, our fight is not with the people of and in the Church, though it may appear so at times by the ways they react to us, but with the Church's religious demons that attack and strip God's joy and freedom from our hearts.

### **Concluding Remarks: Perpetual Change**

America's founding fathers fought a revolution so that we can be free today. Jesus fought our spiritual revolution and won the war

against sin, religious oppression, guilt, and shame. This revolution has been over now for almost 2,000 years. Jesus shed his blood on the battlefield of religion so we would not have to. The results of the revolution Jesus fought and won for us are that we are God's heritage and citizens of the new spiritual nation called the Kingdom of God. Best of all, we are free!

In America, we have to be on guard for those who steal our freedom with their agenda. In God's family, we also have to be alert for those who seek to enslave us with religion. Peter said this about who our real enemy is: "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are" (1 Pet. 5:8-9 [NLT]). Religion has the devil's fingerprints all over it.

The devil wages an unwinnable war against God's heritage; he is already defeated and is able only to make noise. It is his voice and presence in the world and religion about which Peter warns us to be wary; institutionalized religion is the devil's greatest tool to keep people afraid of God and keep them in a religious box of his choosing. The devil does not like it when God changes people spiritually so that they rely only on God, so he uses religion to wage his war against him. The devil's brigade is defeated, so it is making its last ditch effort to prevent people from leaving the Church and clerical control for direct fellowship with God and other believers. The devil does not want us to know that change comes from within each of us as we seek God without the frills of the Church and religion. It is God, not religion that precipitates change in people's lives.

Following only Jesus is a revolutionary idea because we are casting aside the popular religions of the world. When people leave the religions of the world, especially the Church, it takes money out of their coffers and power away from their leaders, resulting in personal attacks on those who have left institutions in order to follow Jesus. Following Jesus alone is uncomfortably different from what people have always been doing. Quitting the Church will not be popular; following one's conscience never is.

We are in a time of change now. This is not a new change in the making; it has been going on since the First Century. Christ began this change when he freed humanity from the bonds of religious obligation. As a matter of fact, we are continually changing and growing spiritually and emotionally.

Paul said this about our continual change:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2 [NLT])

How does a person come to enjoy Christ's freedom? The only thing I can really tell you is to seek God because you belong to him and he is the only one who can tell you what is best for you. I learned something very valuable from a podcast by Wayne Jacobsen called *The God Journey*. Wayne advised listeners to "live in the integrity of your conscience."<sup>8</sup> Seek God and his wisdom only and he

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8 Wayne Jacobsen and Brad Cummings. "The God Journey," podcast. Downloaded from <http://www.thegodjourney.com/audio/2008/0314h.mp3> on 7/15/08

will help you. I have included some Scripture and books that have helped me in the section entitled “Helpful Resources;” you may find these helpful to you as well.

I realize it is difficult to walk out of Church and away from the safety of routine and the visible leadership of Clergy. However, the Church is built upon our trust of what we can see and touch, e.g., liturgy, human direction, buildings, and methodologies. Trusting in anything or anyone but Christ is doomed to disappointment. Liturgies become dull, human leaders leave, buildings crumble, and methodologies change. We can have faith in Christ because he will never leave us or abandon us as the Clergy do.

I resist in directing you what to do if you leave the Church because I do not want to write a manual about “how to not do Church away from Church.” I can only humbly point you to Christ; it is up to you to trust in him and have faith that he will guide you in the uncharted territory of walking with God without religion. “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see” (Heb. 11:1 [NLT]). Having just a little faith in God will take you further than you can ever fathom.

I pray you will be free indeed.



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## Helpful Resources

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The following are some resources that I have used in my walk with God. The following New Testament passages in a modern translation (I like using the New Living Translation.): Jeremiah 31:31-34, Matthew 11:28-30, 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-31, John 13-17, Acts 15, Romans 5-9, 12:9-21, and Galatians 1-6.

Colson, Jake. *So You Don't Want to go to Church Anymore*. Moonpark: Lifestream Press, 2006.

Jacobsen, Wayne. *He Loves Me*, Second Edition. Newbury Park, CA: Wind-blown Media, 8/31/2007. I highly recommend this book.

Narramore, Matthew E. *Tithing: Low-Realm, Obsolete and Defunct*. Graham: Tekoa Publishing, 2004.

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- [www.LivingPress.org](http://www.LivingPress.org)
- [www.LifeStream.org](http://www.LifeStream.org).
- [www.WindBlownMedia.com](http://www.WindBlownMedia.com).
- [www.FamilyRoomMedia.com](http://www.FamilyRoomMedia.com).
- [www.TheGodJourney.com](http://www.TheGodJourney.com).
- [www.JakeColsen.com](http://www.JakeColsen.com).
- [www.TruthForFree.com](http://www.TruthForFree.com).



## Appendix

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**A**s Jesus left and was going out of the temple complex, His disciples came up and called His attention to the temple buildings. **2** Then He replied to them, “Don’t you see all these things? I assure you: Not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down!” **3** While He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached Him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” **4** Then Jesus replied to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. **5** For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many. **6** You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because these things must take place, but the end is not yet. **7** For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **8** All these events are the beginning of birth pains. **9** “Then they will hand you over for persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of My name. **10** Then many will take offense, betray one another and hate one another. **11** Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. **12** Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. **13** But the one who endures to the end will be delivered. **14** This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come. **15** “So when you see the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place” (let the reader understand), **16** “then those in Judea must flee to the mountains!

**17** A man on the housetop must not come down to get things out of his house. **18** And a man in the field must not go back to get his clothes. **19** Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days! **20** Pray that your escape may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. **21** For at that time there will be great tribulation, the kind that hasn't taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again! **22** Unless those days were limited, no one would survive. But those days will be limited because of the elect. **23** "If anyone tells you then, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Over here!' do not believe it! **24** False messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. **25** Take note: I have told you in advance. **26** So if they tell you, 'Look, he's in the wilderness!' don't go out; 'Look, he's in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. **27** For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **28** Wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will gather. **29** "Immediately after the tribulation of those days: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the celestial powers will be shaken. **30** "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and *they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* **31** He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. **32** "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. **33** In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near—at the door! **34** I assure you: *This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place*" (emphasis added). Matthew 24:1-34: ([HCSB])

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# There's something elusive about the spiritual freedom the Church promises to those who come through its doors.

The Church preaches God's unmerited favor towards humanity and then adds lists of duties we must perform to keep God happy. "If you love God," pulpits say, "you'll go to church, obey the clergy, tithe, witness, and get more people into church." Feeling like we have no other choice and fearful of reprisals from God, as Church members we perform our religious obligations and feel ashamed and guilty when we fail to meet the Church's expectations.

The cycle is never ending; we feel guilty and shameful when we fail in any of our religious obligations. When we feel guilty, we try harder and rededicate ourselves to God but always end up back where we started—feeling guilty for failing him in our duties.

**Soul Rape identifies the elements of organized religion, its services, and its leadership, which work in concert to make and keep loyal members, using guilt and shame as the driving forces. The book shows how walking with God should be simple and free from religious obligation. No more religious obligation means no more:**

- Religion
- Going to church
- Clergy
- Sermons
- Tithing
- Church Politics
- Shame
- Guilt



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