

From Ignorance to Heresy: An Inside Look at the Philosophy and Methodology of False Teachers Within the International Churches of Christ

by Joe Franklin

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

Paul told the Galatians that if any person, even an angel from heaven, or even Paul himself, were to preach a gospel contrary to (*other* than or *more* than) the one they had first heard and received, “let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:8-9). The word “gospel” refers to the good news of salvation in Christ, to be received by faith, on the basis of his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. False prophets were found in abundance all throughout the Old Testament; “false teacher” is the term generally used in the church age. Both terms essentially mean the same thing.

The purpose of this study is not to retrace every biblical departure the Boston Movement/ICOC has ever made. Some of the history, however, should be noted because many people are still asleep to the never ending battle Christian churches will have with false teachers and the bad seed they sow (Mt. 13:24-30). Jesus warns, “*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves*” (Mt. 7:15).

God has ordered that every seed shall bring forth fruit after its own kind (Gen. 1:11). God’s law of reproduction applies to the plant kingdom, to humans, and to the spiritual kingdom as well. Without fail, when a seed is planted in a plot of ground it produces a new plant identical to the plant from which the seed came. Nobody, after planting squash would expect to reap potatoes. By the same token, the seed (teaching) of the movement’s founder, Kip McKean, should be analyzed to see if it is the pure word of God or that of a false teacher. The fruit should be analyzed as well.

To put it another way, “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

We can learn a great deal from McKean’s early experiment with building his own movement. Ignorant of the bible’s harder teachings, he began to experiment with controlling others through abusive discipling methodologies. He would soon turn away from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4), setting the stage for the introduction of outright heresy. This happened as early as 1977, when McKean had his funding pulled by his sponsor church in Houston while he was serving as a campus minister at the Heritage Chapel Church of Christ in Charleston, Illinois. Both McKean and his partner, Roger Lamb, received a rebuke from the elders in the form of a letter.

We believe that Brother McKean has brought unBiblical practices, peculiar language, and subtle, deceitful doctrines to Charleston from the Crossroads church at Gainesville, Florida.

Both ministers [Kip McKean and Roger Lamb] constantly refused to admit there was even a problem, and they refused to accept a warning about where some “minor departures” would lead (even in Charleston).

...we are left with no choice but to immediately terminate our association with both Roger and Kip. ¹

McKean proceeded to build his church, and reproduced his own kind—Boston-trained false teachers—to spread his perverted teachings and establish churches in almost every country of the world. The letter above tells it all: “unbiblical practices and deceitful doctrines (2 Pet. 2:1) ...refused to admit there was a problem...refused a warning (2 Tim. 4:4)...terminate our association immediately” (Titus 3:10).

Although the Boston Movement/Multiplying Ministries did not adopt the name "International Churches of Christ" formally until 1993, the Boston Movement and the ICOC are one in the same. The Boston Movement is generally thought to have started in 1979, in Lexington, Massachusetts, as this was the inaugural date marking the beginning of the Boston Church of Christ. Some date the group's history back to Gainesville, Florida in 1967, but I have chosen to begin my inquiry in 1977. It was during this time that Kip McKean and Roger Lamb had their funding terminated.

Some think they can simply talk to these leaders and get them to see their false teachings and change. The Boston Movement and its top leaders have been warned in clear-cut statements such as these since at least 1977 and haven't changed. Brothers and sisters, I believe this is a case of wishful thinking. Are we expecting to “pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?” (Mt. 7:16)

The bible offers the most effective refutation of the Boston Movement/ICOC and its false teachings.

Some may recall the four major doctrinal practices that led to the break in fellowship between the Boston church and the Churches of Christ in 1987. Marvin Phillips, Richard Rogers, and Jerry Jones wrote an article outlining these concerns in a 1988 article published in the Christian Chronicle. The following areas of concern were raised:

- (1) Misuse of authority
- (2) Prerequisites of baptism
- (3) Spiritual elitism, and
- (4) One-over-one discipling ²

In June of 1989, in a similar letter, a group of elders from the Central Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama, further clarified the scriptural departures of the Boston-led religious

movement. Their detailed account gave a clear and needful warning about the erroneous teachings and practices of the discipling, or multiplying ministries. The following excerpt points to an even more fundamental problem:

The areas of concern are not trivial points. They go far beyond arguments about methods, ministry skills, techniques, etc. They are fundamental to the nature of the church, the relationship Christians sustain to God and to each other, the basis for salvation, the gospel message and the role of leaders in the church. In the aggregate, **these teachings amount to another gospel in the same vein addressed by the apostle Paul in the letter to the Galatians.**³

This analysis will focus on the following issues:

- (1) The arguments and methods the International Churches of Christ/Boston Movement have used to get their converts to accept a “different gospel”
- (2) Their view that “disciple’s baptism” is an essential addition to the gospel
- (3) Enforcing Christian guidelines from the perspective of law (man-made rules) rather than the inner discipline of God through the Spirit, and
- (4) A call to stand firm and not be swayed or sentimental towards false teachers and their “human effort gospel”

Before discussing more of the history behind the movement, I would like to point out that Paul was willing to meet with the leaders of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:2, 6) and let his ministry be examined by others. He was open and ready to change anything that was wrong.

Section I: Arguments and Methods of Movement False Teachers

This section will focus on the arguments and methods the International Churches of Christ/Boston Movement have used to get their converts to accept a “different gospel.”

The following list of expressions and words had special unorthodox meanings that were used by leaders to exploit other people. The purpose of these terms was twofold. First, they served to confuse others about the true gospel and its ability to save apart from imposed works and prerequisites (Ro. 11:5-6). Second, these innovative terms made sure that after being converted to “another gospel,” impressionable souls would remain faithful to it and continue a works salvation program. Referred to as academic dishonesty or semantic abuse, some of these were nothing more than human demands cloaked in religious terminology (Eph. 5:6). Items 1-3 are legitimate terms, while 4-9 are not. Item 10 refers to performing Christian works or works salvation while being deprived of the Spirit.

Before we get to the list, it should be understood that those attaining the prized positions of leadership could not appear critical in any way but had to be in complete agreement with the “system” they had been baptized into. Unity meant uniformity. There are no examples of any leader expressing differences or criticisms of the movement without being excommunicated, out of the full-time ministry, and out of the church.

McKean used the following bag-of-tricks as part of his ministry skills and so did those aspiring to leadership. At this level, obedience to McKean’s will was nonnegotiable and absolute. There were slight variations in the delivery of these abusive distortions but imitating McKean was not an option. Being a good disciple meant following the man God had put in charge of the movement. It was also a means to love and acceptance within the group.

Why are words so important? Semantics make the difference between teaching correctly or not, and between the pure gospel and a counterfeit.

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter (Is. 5:20).

1. Justification—We are made holy by Jesus’ grace and are righteous before God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works (Ro. 3:27-28). There are only two ways to be justified: either by faith (promise) or by law-keeping (flesh) (Gal. 2:15-16).
2. Grace—Unmerited favor, a gift. It can’t be earned and those accepting this free offering need not prove their worthiness of it (Eph. 2:8-9).
3. Gospel—The message of glad tidings and good news concerning Jesus Christ and salvation. The gospel is to be received by faith on the basis of His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (I Cor. 15:1-3). Paul preached this message as the true gospel and gave examples of how it could not be applied (Ga. 1:7).

All three of these interlocking elements were beautifully put together by the apostle Paul in the following passage:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Ro. 3:21-24).

4. Progressive Revelation—According to the movement, God can grant revelations of new ways to apply old bible truths. The reality was that Boston leadership claimed that God was, in essence, telling them that additional steps and requirements needed to be added to the plan of salvation (gospel). They also began to establish an entire legal system of man-made rules to cement their gospel into the hearts and minds of their members. McKean said he and other leaders arrived at these new discoveries “after constantly wrestling with God through the scriptures and prayer for nearly 13 years!”⁴

5. Prerequisites or add-ons to the gospel—Jesus plus *anything* is not Jesus. The gospel precludes the need for any human effort, like circumcision, in order to be saved.

Paul was willing to live with differences on matters such as what foods to eat or what days to celebrate (Romans 14 and 15; 1 Corinthians 8 through 10), but when the central truth of the gospel was at stake, he drew a clear line and refused to compromise. He was unwilling, in his defense of "the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:5, 14), to do anything but protect the freedom of God's people.

The Boston Movement/ICOC has inserted at least three very serious and abusive performance expectations or extra requirements into what has become a human-effort gospel or “another gospel.” They are “disciple’s baptism,” “disciple’s repentance,” and “counting the cost.” Also, it could be shown that the *Lordship* study would also be an unbiblical prerequisite or add-on but that might need to be dealt with later. Finally, the collection of the movement’s teachings should be considered a false gospel or add-on in the same vein addressed by the apostle Paul in the letter to the Galatians.

6. Disciple or Discipleship—The term refers to a lifetime process, not something arrived at like an Eagle Scout. The basis of discipleship is a personal relationship with God based on faith and commitment. The term disciple, used correctly, means seeker, follower, learner, or student. The kind of discipleship in Matthew 28:19-20 is an “entry level” variety, not a full-blown knowledge of every aspect of Christian life. They then are baptized and taught further.

The term “disciple” for the movement was a Trojan horse or umbrella concept used to mask their counterfeit gospel and make it more palatable to outsiders. It came with a host of human expectations. These demands varied from person to person. Everyone had to

agree to one-over-one discipleship. Mandatory daily evangelism was also a major expectation with few exceptions. Regardless of the requirements, one of the core problems and one of the chief false teachings that led to the wide-scale abuse was the teaching of delegated authority.

In summary, anything contained within the *First Principle's* series was generally a requirement for being a disciple—being there for all major and minor meetings, living only in places where Boston had planted churches, tithing 10% of one's gross income, believing that the one true church was comprised solely of those who were baptized with a "disciple's baptism," ignoring all negative information about the church by getting seekers to agree to shut down their discernment capabilities to any "persecution," and agreeing to live by the false understanding that our primary "purpose" as Christians is not to love God and enjoy our relationship with him (purpose) but to evangelize (mission).

Failure to perform in any or all of these categories meant baptism was denied or delayed until the seeker was broken, or simply walked away unable to meet the group's expectations.

7. Disciple's Repentance—They have redefined "entry level" repentance in unbiblical terms to meet their own subjective outlook. Basically, the seeker must give a works demonstration of repentance and show they have met the demands of being a disciple, as defined by the Boston Movement. This is a loaded term used to coerce people to obey most everything listed above or baptism was withheld. Taught correctly, the focus is not to weigh down the seeker with a list of the group's expectations—anything irrelevant or unbiblical—but to have faith, repent, and be baptized. Boston insisted that newcomers must be seen "putting into practice what he is learning **as he learns it**,"⁵ yet contradicts this in other venues by saying repentance "is a decision."⁶

People were often told they had a "bad heart" if they didn't prove their repentance according to the group's expectations. Many of those joining the movement from the Churches of Christ, and even Boston's own converts, had to be rebaptized based on this false teaching and other issues concerning baptism. They were told that they were not really saved because they had not repented with a true "disciple's repentance."⁷ This became official church policy on May 29, 1988 as stated in the Boston Bulletin.

8. Disciple's Baptism—This call to conversion limited baptism to those who would give a works demonstration of repentance and who would "walk as a disciple" before they could become disciples (based on Matthew 28:19. "... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing *them* ...). This verse was incorrectly used to mean that "them" was referring to "disciples" but in reality "them" can't possibly mean "disciples"—"them" is referring to the "nations." Therefore, this passage does not support the need to be a disciple prior to baptism based on the grammatical structure of the passage. This was a very important tool in leadership's bag-of-tricks. They had to be careful to read this verse in the NIV only because any other version would show a more accurate interpretation of the pronoun "them."

The bible says nothing about the necessity of being a disciple as a prerequisite for baptism. Taught correctly, the idea is not to make the disciple (seeker) give a works demonstration or have a complete knowledge of all aspects of Christianity while coming to Christ, but to have a simple faith leading to repentance and baptism. The concept of “disciple’s baptism” is not found in any of the conversions in the book of Acts.

At the same time they redefined the definition of baptism. If one has to prove discipleship before he can be baptized, then this is a salvation that is based on his own merit. This is solid proof that the Boston Movement/ICOC is founded on a false human-effort gospel. This became official church policy on May 29, 1988 as stated in the Boston Bulletin.⁸

This teaching is in their literature, tapes, sermons, and official training manual, the *First Principles*. This study series was “taught around the world” to virtually every church within the organization.⁹ This means that at least 218 churches used these instructions to train their leaders and those under them. This was a program of one uniform methodology in discipleship carried out through one training manual—*First Principles*. Anyone converted into the group was also taught using this study series. Therefore, the entire organization has been built with this false teaching.

9. Disciple’s Heart—This was a very manipulative term used in a variety of ways to shame or trap seekers and members into feeling bad for not marching along to the movement’s do-it-yourself gospel. It was initially used to coerce those seeking entry into the group and to smooth things out once the newcomer found a problem with the material being presented. Often times, people would begin to be aware they were being manipulated through *First Principles*.

It was later used as a tool to confuse people about various issues concerning accountability, one-over-one discipling, finances, and a host of commitment issues. Very few newcomers were able to stave off these arrogant, and presumptuous questions concerning the condition of their “hearts” because they weren’t repenting or changing the way the group wanted them to. The term “bad heart” was synonymous with “not being a disciple.” This was a powerful thought-stopper and is further proof that the group had chosen external control (man-made rules), not grace, to motivate. I don’t see anywhere in the bible where, as Christians, we are supposed to judge another person’s heart. This evolved into a church-wide practice starting on May 29, 1988 as stated in the Boston Bulletin.¹⁰

10. “Flesh” is a word used to refer to the human nature when it is deprived of the Spirit of God or overcome by physical desires (Ro 7:5). In their book, *Bible Dictionary*, Murphey, Huffman, James, Eaton, and Pine define flesh and Spirit together.

Flesh represents the sinful nature, urges, and lusts (Eph. 2:3) that cannot please God (Ro. 8:8). Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:19-23).¹¹

It also refers to human effort or works-salvation as shown in Galatians 3:3. “Disciple’s baptism,” “disciple’s repentance,” and “counting the cost” are works of the “flesh.”

Some Current Developments

While the movement stresses openness and dealing with sin in a radical manner, to this day, local leadership and top spokesmen have never specifically stated what their wrong teachings are or even identified them properly. They remain silent on any concern brought to them that undermines their control or financial support. It is difficult finding any informative sermons addressing these issues because many are now available for sale, on a subscription-only basis. They don’t want their teachings scrutinized. Until they exhibit transparency and accountability as prescribed by scripture they will continue in rank hypocrisy.

Making cosmetic changes and trumpeting half-apologies is not enough. Until the core false teachings of the organization are dealt with publicly, and thoroughly re-taught, the foundation will continue to remain faulty. The leadership must be dealt with as well.

As a former member of the International Churches of Christ (ICOC), I and many others had hoped that a 2003 open letter, *Honest to God*, written by one of the group’s most respected leaders, Henry Kriete, would have been the impetus for much-needed reform. This London evangelist wrote a damning indictment of the corruption within the organization and triggered a very reluctant response from the group’s pillar church in Los Angeles. *The Los Angeles Church of Christ Apology Letter* addressed some of the abuses and sins described in Kriete’s letter, but fell far short in exposing the more serious false teachings of the movement. Very quickly, core issues were trivialized and brushed under the rug. The time of change had passed.

For those interested in reading Kriete's letter, it is available at a website called www.barnabasministry.com and can be accessed by pressing the *What’s New* button. Please scroll down to February 2003. The document can be freely distributed without further permission from the author. Several other discipling ministry churches have also made their own apology letters available. However, the most influential, *The Los Angeles Church of Christ Apology Letter*, can be found through the following link at www.newcovpub.com/icc/la_apology.htm.

Unfortunately, neither of these letters did much to focus on the source and foundation of the organization’s maladies; rather, they pointed mainly to the outcomes and painful consequences of them. In other words, both Kriete and the LA letter looked at the “fruit” and not the “root.”

Kriete’s statement, “I believe we may become heretical in just a few more years,” suggests he believed the movement was not yet guilty of false teachings or heresy. The facts tell otherwise. Kriete himself, like all paid staff in the church, was fully involved and supportive of Boston’s teaching on the necessity of being a disciple as a prerequisite for baptism. In fact, he was rebaptized as a result of this heresy (false teaching).

This distorted view of discipleship shortly led to the “remnant view,” which in essence said they were the only Christians and their group was the one true church. Kriete, like the other leaders, has since made his living from exploiting the innocence of vulnerable people. Instead of leading them to a pure Jesus, the practice was to “hook” them with the idea that their church was the only one teaching conversion correctly, thus these impressionable souls had no choice but join the Boston Movement if they wanted to get to heaven.

While Kriete has done a great service to those wanting to learn more about his abusive church and the movement’s practices, he is still in the group. It is next to impossible to fully understand the sins of the International Churches of Christ (ICOC) while being an active member of it. As Christians, we usually can’t see ourselves clearly without getting outside help; how much more so for men who have distorted the gospel and abused God’s children for so many years?

As a member of the movement since 1988, together with my wife who placed membership in 1985, I can tell the reader that the ICOC screens most of the information it allows the public to see and unless you speak their language and have a first-hand knowledge of their practices, it will be very difficult to discern the real facts and the gospel they promote. Currently, some leaders are addressing a few peripheral issues, but instead of calling them “false teachings” and “sin,” they choose language such as “mistakes” or “misapplications.” It would appear that they love their positions and high salaries more than God and the people of God.

More than window dressing is needed when dealing with leadership sin and false teaching on a corporate and local level. Repackaging old doctrines under the pretense that things have changed without seriously looking into the “who”, “what”, “why”, “where”, and “how” of the matter will only invite a return of the bad practice. Cosmetic changes are not enough and give current members false hopes of real and lasting change. Leadership at all levels has been tainted and should be replaced. Sadly, the churches are full of members who seem willfully ignorant, as do the evangelists and elders, of the “elephant” sitting in front of them.

History has shown that the movement does a remarkable job of superficially dealing with issues and appearing to change without ever changing the core issues. For instance, in most ICOC churches today, one-over-one discipling has been replaced with prayer partners. Yet other churches still have group discipling, such as Bible Talk leader over the bible talk members, which is little more than a change from one-over-one to one over eight.

As for discipling, much more could be said but a pattern of flip-flopping on this issue in the past tells reasonable people that the leaders cannot be trusted. Trust is earned. Some may remember that the forerunner of their present views on discipling was the buddy system or prayer partners. That system was stopped, probably because it didn’t “work,” and was replaced with a more controlling model around 1986. From then on, up until

2003, the discipler was given authority over the disciple in a very controlling and intrusive manner.

After much pressure from within, as a result of damaging revelations of leadership abuse and corruption, many local church staff allowed members to go back to the buddy system of discipling. In 2004, Orange County and portions of the Los Angeles church have now abandoned the buddy system and have gone back to the old one-over-one model.

The Methods of the False Teachers (Gal. 3:1; Col. 2:4-5)

Methodology is a procedure or way of teaching the bible that often reflects the attitude that one has toward the bible. It also refers to the way leadership chooses to motivate their flock.

Both the Judaizers and the ICOC demanded that law-keeping be added to faith. Jewish converts had to be circumcised in order to join their group, while seekers in the movement needed to “walk as a disciple” before ever becoming one. Both groups have perverted the gospel because they have insisted that something be added to faith in order to have a right standing with God. Paul acknowledged that those who taught such heresy were indeed cunning characters and false teachers.

In his commentary on Galatians, *The Cost of Changing Course*, Bob Deffinbaugh gives further insight to the craftiness of the Judaizers who taught this “new gospel.” In the First verse of Chapter Three he says:

The term “bewitched” was pregnant with meaning to the first readers of this epistle. A “hex” or “spell” was cast on another by giving him the “evil eye.”¹²

Deffinbaugh contrasts Paul’s method of proclaiming the gospel with that of the Judaizers:

The Judaizers’ gospel had “bewitched” the Galatians by giving them the “evil eye.” Paul’s preaching had converted them by portraying Christ before their very eyes.¹³

Regarding the methodology of the false teachers and the apostle Paul, he states:

I believe that by the use of these two expressions (“bewitched” and “publicly portrayed”) Paul is contrasting his methodology with that of the Judaizers. Their method is underhanded, secretive, and subtle. Paul’s method is direct, open, and public. I sense the same contrast that we find in the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is portrayed as publicly calling forth, speaking forthrightly, inviting all to gain knowledge. Folly is more secretive and seductive; her appeal is to that which is either forbidden or unavailable to the masses. Error is sneaky while truth is straightforward. Error is offered to the elite—truth, to the all.¹⁴

Other insights can be gleaned from the way that Paul refutes the Colossian false teachers. The Christians there were in danger of being kidnapped by their empty philosophy and became a target of their heretical attack. The Colossian heresy was a mixture of an extreme form of Judaism and an early stage of Gnosticism.

*I tell you this so that no one may **deceive** you by ***fine-sounding arguments*** (Col. 2:4).*

Paul was exposing the methodology of the false teachers and highlighting the relevance of “a true knowledge of God” (Col. 2:3, NASB). The method employed by the false teachers— “fine-sounding arguments,” and their claims of special knowledge and insight can be seen in the methodology of the ICOC and their false teachers.

In a Boston Bulletin article, Gordon Ferguson, backed by the top brass of the movement, penned a five-part series of lessons outlining their principle false teachings in the form of a “fine-sounding argument.” Their claim, like that of the Colossian false teachers, was that God granted them special “discoveries” and “significant insights.”¹⁵

The revelation that ultimately became their “deception” was the idea that one must be a disciple *before* baptism in order to be saved (Mt. 28:19). This fed into the notion that the Boston Church was the one true church since nobody else was teaching this. Access to this elite community was through the narrow gate of *their* baptism and nowhere else. Before coming into the fold, prospects would have to submit to human rules of cost counting, works repentance, one-over-one discipling, and absolute obedience to the leaders of the movement.

In their book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart give a warning to those who would teach texts like Matthew 28:19 incorrectly.

You will get into all sorts of trouble if you try to find meanings in the text that you think God has “hidden” in the narrative...Discern and relay what the story recognizably has in it—do not make up a new story (2 Peter 2:3)!¹⁶

Peter also points to the error of false teachers by writing:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...(II Pet. 1:16a).

Being an active disciple from the start seemed innocent enough and was a type of reasonable and very persuasive “fine-sounding argument.” The Boston/ICOC false teachers had a message that was appealing partly due to the exciting and carefully staged Sunday services. Great gains in numerical growth furthered the illusion that the movement was from God.

Therefore, the method they used to snare their followers was that of an argument based on Matthew 28:18-20. They would also use other methodologies.

There is a broader deception here too. Boston, in essence, was teaching that one had to be a disciple according to their definition in order to get to heaven. Since they were able to set the rules and arbitrary expectations of discipleship, seekers were hooked into following their entire program of works even though they may not have agreed with their interpretation. After baptism, new Christians were less likely to be aware that they were trying to work their way to heaven, once again, through more law-keeping and legalistic righteousness.

This philosophy of works salvation comes from the same kind of legalistic approach the Judaizers established. There would be no other way to come to God than through human rules and expectations for both the Judaizers and the ICOC. This philosophy would eventually completely enslave those who succumbed to it without them ever knowing it.

While heretical teachers often claim to possess special knowledge and insight, teachers of the true gospel of Christ direct their listeners toward "...Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2-3).

In his commentary, *Heretical Problems in Light of Union with Christ: Part I, Exhortation Against False Teachers*, J. Hampton Keathley, III, discusses the methods of the false teachers in relation to Colossians 2:4:

"Deceive" is *paralogizomai*, which means literally "to reason aside," and then "to defraud, delude, distort." This word is used in the Septuagint in Genesis 29:25 of Jacob's complaint to Laban because Laban had tricked him with Leah rather than Rachael. The false teachers at Colosse were attempting to trick the Colossians by the method they employed. The method the false teachers used is seen in the statement, "through arguments that sound reasonable." The term here is *pithanologia*, "persuasive speech." It is derived from *pithanos*, "persuasive," and *logos*, "word, argument, speech." In this context Paul uses it in a negative sense of speech that sounds convincing and reasonable, but is actually false.¹⁷

In addition to using a "fine-sounding argument," the leaders chose to rely on the "Whatever works" and "The ends justify the means" methodology. They both essentially mean the same thing. They come from the same basic error of wanting to do things man's way instead of God's way and have been extensively used by the ICOC to gain control over their members. In his analysis, *Authoritarianism in the Church*, Byron Fike, a Church of Christ minister, says:

In determining a Bible truth, one must first ask, "Is it right/biblical?" Of secondary consideration is the question, "Will it work?" When these questions are reversed it leads one to a perverted understanding of Scripture and contributes to one's following the doctrines of men. There

are certain means of interpretation which are invalid in terms of discovering truth.

One such means is allegory. Allegory occurs when instead of concentrating on the clear meaning of a certain text, one inserts another meaning into the text. Stories such as Jethro-Moses, Saul-David, and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem were not written to teach lessons on church organization, submissive discipleship, or reconstructing an existing church. At best such stories can be used to illustrate a point taught elsewhere in the Scriptures. However, if the point in question cannot be proven elsewhere, the allegory is invalid.

Another invalid means of interpretation is prooftexts taken out of context...By determining what one believes (or wants to believe), and then attempting to prove it by prooftexting, one runs a great risk of believing and practicing doctrines of men's invention, not God's.¹⁸

The movement boasts that they follow the bible only, not traditions, or the teachings of men, as stated in *First Principles*. The reality, however, is that they twist and contort the true meaning of scripture to suit their selfish agenda. They claim "There is no private interpretation of the Bible," in *First Principles*, yet because of their self-serving methodology, they end up doing the very thing they say they abhor. The hypocrisy, deceitfulness, and cruelty of the group has had a devastating effect on others.

No matter how persistent they are in defending their motives and methods, common sense leads one to question why they cloak their intentions in such impressive theological vocabulary, especially when they are not truthfully following the bible. They don't want outsiders to see that they are following their own rules, not God's. When a group leaves the teachings of the bible, serious harm and abuse are the only outcomes.

Where does the "Whatever works" and "The ends justify the means" methodology eventually lead in an already abusive discipleship program? It develops into a system of man's creation and uses the force of worldly pressure to meet the director's agenda or personal demands. In the ICOC's case the followers were to become "duplicates" of the leaders. Likewise, the leaders were following the father figure and hero of the movement, Kip McKean. The arbitrary and selective use of fear, guilt, punishment and reward, and the reality of banishment outside the protection of the group, were a constant threat to truth seekers.

These two methodologies snowballed into a behavior shaping program where everyone was forced into being "cookie-cutter" human beings. This structure is very common among cults all over the globe and is a type of methodology. It is known as thought-reform.

In a 1985 editorial in *Discipleship Magazine*, *Disciple Abuse*, Gordon McDonald says:

Abusive disciplinmaking begins when someone seeks people with the conscious or unconscious aim of not growing or leading them, but of controlling them. The extremity of this tendency is cultism. Such controlling does not produce disciples who are Christlike; it rather provides psychic gratification for the one doing the controlling.¹⁹

Much speculation has begun as to whether or not the movement deliberately used thought reform on its members. Lifton states, as cited in Carol Giambalvo's *The Boston Movement: Critical Perspectives on the International Churches of Christ*, that eight psychological themes or patterns constitute a thought-reform program or environment and can be used to evaluate groups in relationship to ideological totalism. Lifton further explains:

Such patterns are all too readily embraced by a great variety of groups, large and small, as a means of manipulating human beings, always in the name of higher purpose.²⁰

It should be mentioned that thought-reform is similar to behavior modification and simply refers to a man-made methodology that produces behavioral changes in people through external control, rules and psychological and social influence techniques as apposed to internal Christ-like transformation that pleases God.

Aspects of thought-reform can be seen in the "battered wife syndrome." The husband is usually a "control-freak". First, he isolates her and then he undermines her ability to think for herself. Every time he hits her, he convinces her that it's her fault. Undue influence can be prevalent in some sales situations, especially time-share seminars.

Numerous well-known cults employ these methods too, but in the end behavioral change programs like these are simply hollow when compared to the real source of transformation that can only come through faith in the Son of God. Margaret Thaler Singer states, as cited in Giambalvo's *The Boston Movement*, that six conditions, not eight, should be met for a thought-reform environment to exist. They are:

- (1) Keep the person unaware of what is going on and how she or he is being changed a step at a time.
- (2) Control the person's social and/or physical environment; especially control the person's time.
- (3) Systematically create a sense of powerlessness in the person.
- (4) Manipulate a system of rewards, punishments, and experiences in such a way as to inhibit behavior that reflects the person's former social identity.

(5) Manipulate a system of rewards, punishments, and experiences in order to promote learning the group's ideology or belief system and group-approved behaviors.

(6) Put forth a closed system of logic and an authoritarian structure that permits no feedback and refuses to be modified except by leadership approval or executive order.²¹

Giambalvo cited interviews of ex-members of the Boston Movement/ICOC and carefully categorized their experiences within the group according to the eight thought-reform criteria identified, not by Thaler Singer, but Lifton. In the final assessment, the movement overwhelmingly met the criteria in relation to thought-reform and ideological totalism in every area. In 1988, Giambalvo states:

While the initial goals of the movement's founders may have been good, the use of thought-reform results in nothing less than totalism. As the thought-reform system gains momentum, more control and more justification becomes necessary. The leaders or founders then take on "the end justifies the means" philosophy and use more and more control.²²

Likewise, Lifton states, as cited in Giambalvo's, *The Boston Movement*, that "Thought reform has a psychological momentum of its own, a self-perpetuating energy not always bound by the interests of the program's directors."²³

In the end, it doesn't really matter whether or not the movement's leaders deliberately used thought-reform or not. What we do know for certain is that they willfully chose to depend on man's wisdom as witnessed by their abusive and deceptive methodology. They set out to build a worldwide church of their own imagination, with Christ being a shadow in the background and not the real force. They chose to construct and maintain this system of control in violation of numerous scriptural passages and guidelines. They chose to manipulate, mislead, and exploit people within an atmosphere of regulations and legalism. This can be nothing more than a movement of man.

There is no difference between the totalism found within the system of thought-reform and the concept of totalitarianism. They both mean the same thing. *Webster's* defines totalism as "completely authoritarian...dictatorial...one group maintains complete control..."²⁴ Jesus condemned this kind of methodology in the book of Matthew by saying,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become **great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave** (Mt. 20:25-27).

Motivating the flock through "Whatever works" is the easy, lazy way, but the consequences are devastating. The direction from Jesus here is so clear that even a third-

grader could understand and apply it. Why did the leaders choose to abuse people through a corrupt form of behavior modification? The answer is because it works. It allowed them to exploit others physically, emotionally, and materially to their own benefit.

The goal of the Boston Movement's methodology was to recruit and retain members. This was carried out within the social and psychological framework of thought-reform, common to cults and abusive groups.

At the same time, other powerful forces of change were at work. The movement's guiding methodology of "The ends justify the means" wreaked havoc on others. This kind of philosophy came with a parade of other abusive methodology including the use of allegory, prooftexting, picking and choosing, and extracanonical authority. In fact, the sheer ignorance of these approaches and the reckless and arrogant manner by which the leadership used them can only result in serious false teaching or heresy.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, list three likely characteristics of the kind of people that tend to rely on bad bible interpretation. They are those that are desperate, impatient, and ignorantly believe that everything in the bible applies as direct instruction to their own lives. I think that pretty much describes the movement's leadership then and now.²⁵

The Philosophy of the False Teachers (Col. 2:8)

After deceiving people into accepting their false teaching through a fine-sounding argument and special insight, the movement sought to enslave its followers through its philosophy.

Some key points can be learned from the Colossian heresy even though Paul never explicitly describes the false teaching he opposes. From the scriptures, we can infer what Paul was saying about the church at Colosse. Zondervan lists these elements as strict rule-keeping, asceticism, worship of angels, depreciation of Christ, secret knowledge, and reliance on human wisdom and tradition. Zondervan also says:

These elements seem to fall into two categories, Jewish and Gnostic. It is likely, therefore, that the Colossian heresy was a mixture of an extreme form of Judaism and an early stage of Gnosticism.²⁶

What we do know of the Colossian philosophy is that it contained these elements and was both hollow and deceptive. Paul's objective in this letter, according to *Halley's Bible Handbook*, was to "correct the false doctrines of the Judaizers on the one hand and the Greek philosophers on the other, and resultant compromise doctrines."²⁷

*See to it that no one takes you **captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy**, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Col 2:8).*

After “hooking” new followers with a fine-sounding argument or special “insight,” false teachers waste no time to begin enslaving their followers through worldly and deceptive philosophy. Although some philosophical ideas can be good, it is clear that this kind was very harmful, “hollow and deceptive.” Furthermore, this kind of philosophy had no content, truth, or power. The dual nature of human wisdom versus divine wisdom can be seen in the first two chapters in the First Book of Corinthians.

Paul said that these errant philosophies “lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Col. 2:23) because they are founded on “human commands and teachings” (Col. 2:22). Similarly, he referred to the philosophy of the Galatian false teachers as “weak and miserable principles” (Gal. 4:9) because their source came from “the basic principles of the world” (Gal. 4:3) and not on Christ (Col 1:27).

In his commentary on this passage (Col. 2:8), Hampton Keathley, III, points to the danger in being taken captive by false teaching.

The Greek word for “captive” is *sulago*, “carry off as booty, or as a captive, or rob someone.” It is used here figuratively of carrying someone away from the freedom that comes from the truth in Christ into the bondage of error. Jesus said, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free,” but when we move away from Christ, even though the false teachers are promising freedom (cf. 2 Pet. 2:18-20), we are taken into bondage. The false teachers of this world are seeking to claim believers as their booty and so rob them of the fullness of Christ’s life.²⁸

Some important ideas can be gleaned from the above section and applied to the Boston Movement/ICOC, as they will help us understand the source of their hollow philosophy. Noteworthy is that there were six elements to the Colossian heresy. The Boston heresy exhibits four of the six elements found in that list.

They are: (1) strict rule-keeping, (2) depreciation of Christ, (3) secret knowledge, and (4) reliance on human wisdom and tradition. Unlike the Colossian heresy, which was flavored by a mixture of different groups and practices, the ICOC’s heresy is closely fashioned after the Jewish Christians, the Judaizers (Legalists). In any event, the movement sought to approach God through legalism, guided by their philosophy.

This philosophy came from three sources: (1) human traditions, (2) the basic principles of this world (possibly demonic in origin (I Tim 4:1), (3) and the bypassing of Christ (Gal. 5:2; Col. 1:27; 2:9). In fact, Paul brings all corruption under these three types.

The movement’s philosophy includes all three elements.

Category 1: The corruption of “human tradition.”

Although the ICOC touts itself as a church that follows the bible only and not traditions, they clearly have created their own traditions and creeds. I guess they just don't want to follow other people's traditions. Hampton Keathley, III, says:

Tradition” is paradosis, “a handing down or over” and is used of teachings, commandments, and narratives. As with “philosophy,” there are biblical or divine traditions that have their source in God's special revelation, and human traditions, those that come from man's own ideas and theories. Human traditions may be neutral and harmless as in the order of church worship, special events and ceremonial procedures, or policies in the conducting of human affairs, but the concern is when they, as here in Colossians and with the tradition of the Pharisees, nullify the teachings and commands of Scripture (cf. Mark 7:1-13).²⁹

In the ICOC, many traditions have been handed down by the leadership that nullified scripture, but the focus of this analysis will center on the ones that pervert or directly nullify the gospel of God's grace. Those traditions include “disciple's baptism,” “disciple's repentance,” “counting the cost,” and the aggregate of the group's other teachings, which, when taken as a whole, also rise to the level of the Galatian heresy. The group sought to redefine these biblical principles in order to suit their own agenda of growth and legalistic righteousness. These traditions are found in printed material, especially the *First Principles* study series.

In 1988, the Boston Church of Christ set out a series of articles outlining their beliefs and doctrines. I believe that this functioned as a creed which led to tradition. It included, among other things, “disciple's baptism” and “disciple's repentance.” In their book, *Bible Dictionary*, Murphey et al. define creed as:

A statement of Christian belief and doctrine. Three ancient creeds, while not found in the Bible, are based on passages from the New Testament (I Co 15:3).³⁰

In Section Two I will show that “disciple's baptism” is not in the bible and nullifies the true gospel by adding irrelevant works to it. Therefore, the ICOC can't trace it back to the kind of legitimate creed found in the passage above. No matter how hard they try to reference “disciple's baptism” to some obscure passage, “disciple's baptism” is not a *bible doctrine* but *their doctrine*. It is further proof of their hypocrisy and reliance on traditions and creeds to control and motivate people.

Category 2: The corruption of “basic principles of this world.”

Consider some of the ideas and tenants of false philosophies that pervade our culture today: “God helps those who help themselves,” “He will judge us according to our performance,” “Greater faith results in greater wealth,” and so on.

Hampton Keathley, III, says:

Everything—from the playboy philosophy to materialism, astrology to scientism, sensualism to sorcery—is seeking to possess the American mind to manipulate our behavior and motivate our spending. And often Christians are among those who respond because their emptiness has not been filled by the fullness of Christ. His fullness fills our emptiness.³¹

He also cites seven forms of philosophies of worldliness in existence today that can and will nullify our walk with Christ.³²

SEVEN SUBTLE PHILOSOPHICAL SNARES OF WORLDLINESS				
IDENTIFIED AND EXPLAINED				
Identification	Explanation	Its Distortion	The Snare	The Effect
Materialism	Matter is all that matters	Deformed view of the world	I am what I own	Affluence, accumulation, occupied with things, consumer mentality, neglect spiritual things.
Activism	I must fill my life with activity.	Deformed view of work. Seeking from work what only God can give.	I am what I produce, accomplish.	Neurotic, consuming ministry. Seeking significance from work rather than from the Lord.
Individualism	I must depend on no one but myself.	Deformed view of self. Produces a me-ism society.	I am the source of my own life.	Loneliness, resistance to authority, inability to work on a team.
Conformism	Recognition by others is primary and necessary.	Deformed view of the importance of the opinions of others.	I am who and what others recognize me to be.	Praise dependent, seeking significance from the approval of others.
Relativism	It matters not what you believe as long as you believe something.	Deformed view of truth. Refuses to recognize revealed truth.	I am whatever I want to believe.	Subjective approach to life, to Scripture; Experience oriented, uncertain faith, emotional.
Secularism	Man has no need of religion. Man is sufficient.	Deformed view of man. Fails to take into account man's sinfulness.	I am sufficient to handle my affairs.	“Sunday only” kind of Christian. Fail to integrate God into all areas of life or reject God completely.
Religionism	If I am good, go to church, etc., I will be okay.	Deformed view of God.	I am okay because of my religious works and activities.	Have some facts about God, engaged in some religious activity, but lacking in inner reality. Fail to integrate God into all areas of life.

These charts were adapted from material in *Defeating the Dragons of the World, Resisting the Seduction of False Values*, Stephen D. Eyre, Intervarsity Press, 1987.

Before looking at these groupings, I would like to look at *Halley's Bible Handbook* because it has a rather compelling, but simple, outlook on legalism that should be mentioned:

[A Legalist]...wants to know what to do to be a Christian. He sees certain plain commandments, or what appear to him to be plain commandments, and he obeys them...Who are legalists? They are those who rest their salvation on themselves rather than on Christ.³³

Parallels Between Activism and Legalism

Webster's defines legalism as: "Strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code."³⁴ By looking at activism in our chart we can see that a parallel to legalism exists. In terms of the ICOC, the false teachers themselves had shaped the moral codes and regulations of the heretical system. Neither the codes nor those who allowed them are from God.

"I am what I produce, accomplish," for a legalist means that deeds are the verifiable proof of one's spirituality. A system of rewards and punishments accompany those acts. This can be seen in the way the movement promotes its members into the higher echelons of leadership.

For instance, in order to become a bible talk leader a person must be "personally fruitful" (make a disciple). After they are appointed a bible talk leader they must continue to baptize more people and need to show that their group is also actively trying to bring in new members. If that is accomplished and the person is deemed "leadership material" he could work his way up the performance ladder to house church leader, zone leader, and eventually evangelist. All of their efforts are based on human expectations and self-effort, resulting in alienation from Christ (Gal. 5:4).

This is what Paul meant by putting confidence in the flesh. Self-effort and fleshly achievements such as these, no matter how well-intended, were never meant to provide that which only God can offer. Even when the goal is reached, it turns out to be a hollow return for the effort, and a source of spiritual pride that has the reverse effect of driving the person further away from God and other people.

Real worth, value and identity come from Christ, not a system of shifting performance standards. In the end, there is nothing left to boast about for the activist/legalist because the immeasurable grace of God makes it useless to measure and compare ourselves with others.

Inevitably, when you try to depend on a righteousness that is based on arbitrary performance expectations, you will always see yourself as a failure (Gal. 3:12).

"Deformed view of work. Seeking from work what only God can give." The legalist chooses to live by law and not faith. In Galatians 2:21 Paul says, "I do not set aside the

grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.” The legalist sees his “good works” as deserving salvation. His way of coming to God and having a relationship with Him depend on a works-righteousness or works-salvation that perverts the gospel due to one’s deformed view of work.

Grace cancels out the law and faith cancels out meritorious works (Ro. 3:27-31).

The deformed view of the activist seeks to find fulfillment and joy from their “works” but that kind of reward can only come through a reliance on God, not man. The activist and the legalist do not understand their need for grace and forgiveness since they place so much confidence in their own ability to outperform everyone else. They tend to look down on others.

In setting aside both grace and faith in favor of a very appealing do-it-yourself model of human achievement, these two philosophies are worthless (Mt. 15:9). Paul said that man was unable to save himself without the grace of God. Both the activist and the legalist try to earn their way to heaven while never fully understanding the importance of grace and being united with Christ.

Activism/legalism ends up in misery and despair because salvation is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9) and is not dependent on works. We are to depend on God’s grace as the source (II Tim. 2:1-4), course (I Co. 15:10), and force (Ro. 5:1-2; II Ti. 2:1-4).

The philosophy of life for both activism and legalism are basically the same. Both share the pitfall of putting their confidence in the flesh. Both of these philosophies are rooted in law-keeping, traditions, performance, and a system of rewards and punishments of human origin. Paul rejected this theology by calling it “rubbish” in Philippians 3:4-9.

This kind of activism/legalism can be shown through the movement’s approach to the passage in John 12:24. It reads, “...unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” The activist/legalist embark on a plan to put this teaching into practice and share the dogged determination to see that goal reached through relying on themselves, while Christ is on the sidelines. The movement, however, had to make sure everyone would “get behind” the plan to evangelize the world in one generation. They began to control every aspect of a disciple’s life—their time, relationships, hobbies, and special gifts.

Activism and legalism led to the group’s obsession with statistics, accountability sheets, and meeting a certain number of new people daily. It was also the force behind endless campaigns, discipleship times, and Nehemiah projects.

Therefore, the source of the ICOC’s guiding philosophy is activism/legalism. The leaders were able to package this false notion quite effectively and charm others through a confusing array of passages and corrupt traditions dealing with the concept of discipleship, repentance, and cost counting. Their philosophy was the glue that held their program of works-salvation together. It made it all the more reasonable and it had a

disarming effect on those who were in the group and had already begun to ascribe to their program.

The warning against following man's wisdom and philosophy instead of God's scripture as the authority can be seen in the following scriptures: Pr. 3:5-6; Jn. 14:6; Ro. 12:1-2; II Co. 5:21; Col. 2:6-10; Jas. 3:13-15.

The leaders imposed their human demands on prospective seekers; hence, they have added their own legalistic rules to the gospel and have become false teachers. A program of "total commitment" was also imposed upon each member after entry into the group through various control mechanisms and false teachings. Leaders sought to enforce Christian behavior through the outer discipline of man-made rules rather than the inner discipline of Christ, a submissive faith, and the Holy Spirit (Ro. 8:1-4). These methods and doctrines form a "different gospel" (Gal. 1:6).

Category 3: The corruption of building apart from Christ

The final phase for anyone buying into this system of falsehood was that they would become slaves to it (Gal. 2:4; 4:9; 4:31). A large percentage of people coming out of the Boston Movement/ICOC, profess to suffer from the repercussions of becoming a guilt-motivated, works-oriented Christian. This seems to be the only course and life-style ever produced by the movement.

False philosophies deceive, distort, and enslave their listeners and no wonder, for Satan himself "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Co. 11:14). By taking a closer look at the philosophies and false teachings of the next few groups we can better see a pattern for the false religion of the Boston Movement/ICOC.

The Gnostic's philosophy stated that since everything about man is flawed, our works could play no part in our own salvation. Their notion was that they were saved purely by grace and were unable to do anything toward their own salvation. This deception guided their heresy or false teaching. For instance, one of their claims was that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh. That only makes sense since they believed that the flesh was inherently depraved, thus making it impossible for the Son to have actually become a man. Their hollow and deceptive philosophy lent believability to their heretical ideas and practices. The apostle John called them deceivers and antichrists (II John 7).

Some of the most appealing churches today preach what is commonly called the "prosperity gospel." Their idea is that since Christians are royalty we ought to live like kings. In his book, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*, David Bercot says,

The "health and wealth gospel" is extremely popular in the church today. Many of the fastest growing churches in America and throughout the world preach this "gospel." Some prosperity preachers build an entire theology around one verse from the Third Letter of John: "Beloved, I pray

that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2 NAS).³⁵

Other prosperity preachers cite Psalm 23:1 and 34:10 to bolster their philosophy of material blessing.

In both these cases the objective of the group determined their method. The following heretical group functioned in almost the same manner as the ICOC of today. They were known as the Judaizers.

As stated by Jerry Jones in *From Slavery to Sonship: A Study of Paul’s Message to the Galatians*, regarding the arrival of false teachers in Galatia:

Evangelizing this area of the world raised two questions: (1) How do you keep people doing right without law? and (2) How do you encourage proper Christian behavior without destroying Christianity? The gospel of Christ was Paul’s answer to these two questions (Ga. 1:7). Grace isn’t simply a doctrine; it’s a life-style that controls how you live before God. It’s a relationship, not a checklist.

The Judaizers (Christian Jews who believed that the law of Moses should be kept by Gentile Christians) determined that law should be used to control behavior and to produce behavioral changes. They felt the Christian’s orientation or dynamic came from the law rather than from faith in Christ. Paul called their method a “different gospel” (Ga. 1:6).

The Judaizers’ objective—behavioral changes as opposed to internal transformation—determined their method. Their approach to religion for centuries had been one of control—“thou shalt not...” For example, to keep Jews from violating the commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy,” the Judaizers built “fences” around the law to restrict violations. A “fence” such as healing on the Sabbath ensured that no one would work on that day. But the “fences” were ends in themselves and became equal with the law (Jesus called them “rules taught by men” [Mt. 15:9]). Behavior modification orchestrated the “gospel” they preached.³⁶

Paul believed just the opposite; he felt that the nature and essence of the gospel should control the objective. The objective of the Judaizers determined their method; hence, the end (objective) justified the means (different gospel). Paul’s objective was “Christ in you” (Ga. 2:20; 4:19), out of which flowed a life in harmony with that presence.

The Judaizers and the ICOC have these traits in common: (1) a deep mistrust of the concept of grace, (2) the use of law-keeping to control behavior and produce behavioral changes, (3) additions to the gospel, (4) a program or environment of behavior modification and “rules taught by men,” (5) salvation resting on themselves rather than

on Christ, and (6) their leadership were false teachers even though they were not wrong on all doctrinal issues.

The Judaizers probably used the Old Testament to defend their legalistic view of religion while the ICOC has also used the Old Testament in combination with Matthew 28:18-20 and other New Testament scriptures to justify their own beliefs. According to *Halley's Bible Handbook* the Judaizers were misinterpreting the promise to Abraham as evidenced in the Abraham narrative itself (Gal. 4:21-31).³⁷

Instead of building upon Christ, the source, force, and course taken by the ICOC were that of man—his philosophies, rules, and guilt-induced achievements. Activism/legalism played itself out within a framework of pharisaical legalism, behavior modification, and heresy. The movement was able to produce short-term results that have not stood the test of time.

Since leaders were able to set their own standards for being spiritual they were able to easily reap the material rewards that would come to them in the form of high salaries and special treatment. Likewise, once they reached the top of the pyramid, they would receive attention, belonging, and power from those under them. Any insecurities they had coming into the movement would now be met at this level through the feeling of being needed by others. A complete role-reversal has happened within this kind of perverted system in that the members are now serving the needs of the leaders instead of the other way around. The leaders would feed off the sheep getting psychic gratification from being needed and imitated (Mt. 7:15).

In trying to grapple with these ideas, some have incorrectly interpreted the source and course of the group to fit the slogan “they did all the right things for all the wrong reasons.” This does not fit the situation, however, because of the principle found in Colossians 2:6-7. The works most often done by those enslaved to this heretical group are not necessarily good works; rather, they are partly inspired by worldly forces and false teaching that make serving the interests of the group paramount to freedom in Christ. In the ICOC system, justification and sanctification rest on human effort and not Christ as the true doctrine. In terms of salvation, it's a man-made gospel of human effort both coming and going.

The kind of works being established by the ICOC were built upon “weak and miserable principles” (Gal. 4:9) that were self-serving and left God out of the picture. Furthermore, legalistic trust in “good works” and activism indicates a return to slavery (Gal. 4:3) and a waste of time and effort for those who haven't learned the lessons of Pharisaic legalism in Galatia.

I think the intentions of the members were good but as the apostle Paul says, “that does not make me innocent” (I Co. 4:4). As their own leaders have written, “Sincerity does not equal truth.”³⁸ Many members end up being both victims and perpetrators and are completely unaware of the difference between the bible and the group's man-made rules

and false gospel. Keeping a person unaware of what is going on is one of the criteria of thought-reform.

Take the example of sharing one's faith, for instance. First of all, the message being promoted by the organization is *their news*, not the *good news* of hope in Jesus. The sole purpose of sharing one's faith should be to joyfully glorify and lift up Jesus and tell others about what he has done in your life. In the group it means telling others about how "awesome" your church is, and about all the things they are doing. That does not glorify anything other than man and his accomplishments. It is very misleading too because, upon arriving to church, the seeker will be enticed to start the *First Principles* training program which is full of false teaching, incremental traps, and damning logic.

Sharing your faith in this kind of false system is really an invitation to a life of slavery or an invitation to be exploited by false teachers and their heretical message. This definitely is not a good work. Trying to achieve righteousness by these kinds of works means trying to attain your goal through human effort or "the flesh," instead of being led by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:3). The goal of evangelism for this group is not to study the bible as much as it is used to get seekers to enter a tightly controlled, coordinated program of thought-reform, manipulation, and legalism (Gal. 4:17).

Guilt-induced evangelism and the seeking of vulnerable people are examples of false love, not real love. If it were real love, there would be no manipulation and bible study would not be done within a thought-reform environment. The force to move the prospect into a right standing with God would be a biblical transformation through faith and the Holy Spirit with transparent honesty and union with Christ.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the sheer number of "hard teachings" that the movement boasts of following have been borne out of this deceptive philosophy of action discipleship (activism). Often-used words and phrases that probably only have real meaning for those within this system include: "Just do it!"; "make it happen!"; "make disciples"; "crank"; and "blitzing." In the event that someone was "struggling" with their faith and in need of real spiritual help, they were told to stop being selfish and get out there and do more works. The group's solution to almost everything is baptize, baptize, baptize. It is truly a "human effort gospel" of works salvation.

This philosophy of activism/legalism was also one of the sources of the movement's false teachings. The ICOC sees the bible and its teachings without Christ being the center of the whole system. In other words, they believe the gospel can be improved upon. They are going to fix God's mistakes for him. Ignorantly, they saw certain things in the bible that fit in with their philosophy. Speaking on the issue of the all-sufficiency of Christ, Halley says:

A philosopher sees in Christian teaching certain things that fit in with his philosophy. He accepts Christ, and calls himself a Christian. But in his thinking certain of his philosophic abstractions are central, and Christ himself personally is just a sort of shadow in the background.³⁹

This errant philosophy has guided the organization's approach to scripture. Even to this day, the mentality that one should "do whatever it takes to get the job done" is heard and seen in their sermons and literature. This is the ends-justify-the-means approach that is very dangerous.

Applying the bible correctly comes after one interprets it correctly. The ICOC has a very poor exegesis; therefore its hermeneutics are incorrect as well. A basic rule of interpretation is that "a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers. That is why exegesis must always come first."⁴⁰ Drawing improper conclusions can be seen by their misuse of Matthew 28:18-20.

The problem with the ICOC, however, is that like the philosopher, they were driven by their own desire for growth and quick results (the ends) first, then searched the scriptures in order to justify the practice they had created (the means) afterwards. This is backwards. It also shows that they were more interested in looking good than being good.

There's a saying, "You're only as smart as you are educated." Since the ICOC does not believe in getting sound biblical training for its ministers and women leaders, that doesn't make them very smart. In fact, as a group, they chose to establish their own in-house training program through the study series, *First Principles*, written and developed through Kip McKean.⁴¹ The series itself is little more than a blueprint on how to convert people, through works and legalism, into a man-made system of more works and legalism.

The only acceptable source, course, and force for any movement claiming to be of God is Christ himself, no more and no less (Col. 1:27). Anything other than that is not God's plan for our lives. This timeless theme of reliance on God and not man and his wisdom can be seen in the book of Psalms.

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain (Psalm 127:1a).

The Three Betrayals

The sum of the movement's beliefs can be categorized under three main points. Their doctrine and theology were built around Matthew 28:18-20 and the guiding force of: (1) "total commitment," (2) the philosophy of activism/legalism, and (3) the methodology/philosophy of "make it work" and "the ends justify the means."

I realize the second category could be expanded to include works-salvation, law-keeping, and building apart from Christ (graceless gospel) but I see those errors as coming out of the deceptive philosophy of activism/legalism, and not the source. Leadership rejected the yoke of Jesus (Mt. 11:30) in favor of binding religious laws on other people. Under the consuming influence of this deformed view of the importance of work and the

movement's twisting of passages like John 12:24 and the "denial" passages, this philosophy covers all sub-points.

Similarly, works salvation fits a group like the ICOC because it refers to the human nature when it is deprived of the Spirit of God or overcome by physical desires (Ro 7:5). Many of the works done by members are not within the will of God as witnessed by the scope of this analysis and the "other gospel" they promote.

All three of these ideas would betray those who followed them by enslaving them to a system where the burden of salvation rested on themselves, not God. Paul warned the Galatian Christians that acceptance of this new gospel would result in their falling away (Gal. 5:4). Sadly, history shows that the churches there were never able to rid themselves of the yoke of slavery they had embraced. There is no historical record that strong churches existed in the southern area of the Roman province of Galatia (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe). Paul's prediction had come to pass.

The "ends justify the means" for anyone within a legalistic system like the ICOC means that it is okay to manipulate and twist scriptures if it's for a higher cause. Other times, the entire force of all three ideas came in to play when anyone challenged the church's position on controlling pet doctrines such as one true church, evangelizing the world in one generation, submission to the authority of self-appointed leaders, one-over-one discipleship, and finances.

Some of their false teaching can be traced back to all three principles, like Matthew 28:18-20.

Category 1: The betrayal of "total commitment" within the body of Christ.

The false concept of "total commitment" within an entire group of people has been used by cults and abusive churches throughout history. This demand for purity is one of the eight characteristics of thought-reform. The idea that this should or even could be achieved through his own design shows the ignorance of Kip McKean and the leadership within the movement:

However, during these years, I gradually came to a deep conviction that no matter how dynamic a campus work, **unless a whole church is "totally committed,"** the campus ministry's impact would be limited.⁴¹

Although there are no examples in the New Testament of an entire church being totally committed, this seems to be McKean's primary objective as a church builder.

Since McKean's objective, "total commitment," is not possible because every church will always be comprised of sinners, the guiding expectation must have come from his own imagination. In any event, this principle was very damaging to other people and is nothing more than chasing after the wind (Ecc. 2:11).

The idea of “total commitment” can best be seen by looking at the rules and regulations found in *Discipleship, Lordship, and Counting the Cost*, in *First Principles*. This kind of impossible objective made prospects go through hell in order to get to heaven.

Anyone who has left this group knows what “total commitment” really meant. It was a program of total commitment to the leaders and their “rules taught by men.”

There is no difference between the totalism found within the system of thought-reform and the concept of “total commitment” for McKean and movement’s leadership. They both mean the same thing. *Webster’s* defines totalism as:

“completely authoritarian...dictatorial...one group maintains complete control...”⁴²

Thought-reform is based on the psychology of totalism with the goal of ideological totalism, where everyone thinks the same. Thought-reform is responsible for ideas such as “group-think” or “unity equals uniformity.” It is a methodology that gets people to march to the same drum without ever being aware because it is subtle and incremental.

Thought-reform is the same as “mind control” but it is not to be confused with “brainwashing” as some have suggested. The ICOC uses “mind control” and thought-reform as a discipling methodology.

There is no doubt that the ICOC is using thought-reform as a method to get their members to be totally committed. Sadly, they chose to motivate people through a man-made system of social and psychological rewards and punishments that resulted in one uniform methodology and a homogenous body of believers void of dissent or real individuality.

Finally, totalism, totalitarianism, or “total commitment” are all one-in-the-same and can only be achieved through thought-reform or other law-keeping systems. A formula depicting this would be:

Thought-reform=totalism= “total commitment”

Finally, for those who have been in the movement, it is important to realize why you were susceptible to thought-reform in the first place so that you do not fall under its spell again.

This kind of structured, simplistic program gave immediate relief to some very vulnerable people by giving them the answers they thought they needed. The ICOC’s program offered the downtrodden new friends, elitism, a new purpose, and help with insecurity and low-self esteem. Some came from abusive backgrounds and were accustomed to being abused and felt at home in this man-made system.

As stated by Jerry Jones in *What Does the Boston Movement Teach* about a concluding statement in a film called *The Wave*:

You traded your freedom for the luxury of feeling superior. You accepted the group's will over your own convictions no matter who it hurt.⁴³

The idea that the ICOC is the only group that is “totally committed” is a mirage, an illusion and a myth. A good question to ask someone who believes this is “what” are they committed to—the teachings and practices of the apostles or the teachings and practices of men?

Category 2: The betrayal of the philosophy of activism and legalism.

No one knows for sure why the movement fell prey to the deceptive philosophy of activism and legalism. My best guess is that they had a difficult time, like many of us, accepting a God who saves by grace than accepting a God who demands obedience to a law-keeping system. Those who don't feel the need for their own forgiveness often have a hard time seeing their need for God's grace. Mistrusting the principle of grace leads one to approach salvation the only other way, by works.

The Boston Movement did not just exist in a vacuum, but came out of the Crossroads ministry. It can also trace its roots back to the churches of Christ and the Restoration Movement. Their movement became a kind of protest against the “cold, dead, and hypocritical...tradition-bound churches...inept at helping...the sorrowful...”⁴⁴

McKean and the Boston leaders could address this perception through two possible options. They would either motivate their flocks from within or from a yoke without. Their approach would come from grace (freedom) or legalism (slavery). They would either seek to dominate their converts or allow that Christ be formed in them (Gal. 4:19-20).

Boston leadership chose a course that would have a devastating impact on themselves and their hearers (I Tim. 4:16). They chose the way of law-keeping instead of the way of faith. Law would be the “force” or power to live as a Christian whereas Paul's emphasis was on the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 18, 25). This “cattle drive” mentality was quick and easy to do and required little work on the part of leadership, most of whom had no bible training whatsoever. The power of having Christ formed within you (Gal. 4:19) is much harder and takes much longer to accomplish.

We become activists when, instead of filling the void in our hearts with God, we try and fill it with activity. Proper motivation says that once your life is filled up with God, you have the proper motivation to do the activities. The ICOC leadership took a shortcut; they insisted their members be filled with them.

Category 3: The betrayal of “make it work” and “the ends justify the means.”

The following section was inspired by Jule Miller and Texas Stevens *History of the Lord’s Church*, drawing from their knowledge of how the early church slipped into heresy.

It happened when Bishops began formulating human rules and doctrinal statements to be used by the churches. These unholy men or false teachers were planting their seeds of departure even during the days of the apostles.

It started out innocently enough. Certain men began exalting one elder above the others and proclaimed him the title of “bishop.” The trend snowballed into a power struggle among church leaders. Despite New Testament teaching, certain “bishops” were governing several congregations within their region, the present-day equivalent of a diocese.

By the third century the practice of meeting between bishops within a given Roman Province had begun. While discussing current problems, they came up with their own human rules and doctrinal statements that circulated into their congregations back home.

Then came the first human creed written in 325 A.D. by the bishops from the Western area of the Roman Empire. Called the Nicene Creed, the goal was create some human laws designed to govern all Christians. These men were self-appointed in that they had no biblical right to make and bind religious laws upon other believers. That right belongs to Jesus, the true head of the church.⁴⁵

The ICOC does whatever is practical, expedient, or “whatever works.” They do this because the bible is only a shadow of a standard for them and not their sole guide. Leaders see themselves, like the bishops of the third century A.D., in a role where to manage and control other Christians for a higher cause, is the right thing to do, even if there is no biblical precedence for it.

But in leaving the New Testament teachings in small areas, the movement’s one or two minor rules quickly became a “system” of major rules. As the church began to show growth, things got out of hand and more and more control and law-keeping was needed. As some have said, “They started out with the power of love and ended up with the love of power.”

Although this passage in Psalms is referring to the rich, it sheds light on this topic.

This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings (Psalm 49:13).

The ICOC’s philosophy or method of “the ends justify the means” meant that, for them, it was okay to manipulate because it’s for a higher cause—baptism and a relationship with

God. Whether they planned it or not, their philosophy began to take on the eight characteristics of thought-reform commonly used by cults and abusive groups today.

Thought-Reform

In 1961, psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton's book "*Brainwashing: The Psychology of Totalism*," was published. Lifton studied brainwashing for the US Army during the Korean War, as did Margaret Singer and Dr. Louis J. West. He then went to China to study their "totalitarian" re-education" program. His extensive research and data collection was meticulously analyzed and catalogued. Out of that came eight psychological themes that constitute a thought-reform program or environment.

Currently, the Boston Movement/ICOC meets all eight categories identified by Lifton, making itself a cult. In fact, thought-reform remains one of the most powerful tools the organization has in keeping the members from escaping their abusive situations.

The "make it work" mentality often ends in thought-reform for abusive, authoritarian groups like the ICOC who tend to spin out of control without layers and layers of rules to justify their damaging philosophy.

Here are categories 1, 5, and 3 of Lifton's thought-reform criteria and a brief explanation of how the movement meets those techniques. This is by no means a complete list and there are many other examples that could be used. Some of the ideas have also come from Carol Giambalvo's book *The Boston Movement*.

Category 1: Milieu Control

This method controls information and communication within the group. Critical information from outside the group is quickly criticized by leadership and eventually the group members themselves begin to block out "unsafe" information and ideas. It is a campaign to psychologically isolate the members of a given group of people. Friends and family are considered "unsafe" while the group itself are the only credible people. All other sources of information and feedback are discredited. Undermining the person's former support systems causes the person to turn to the group for information and support. The frightening result is total dependence upon the group for validation.

This can be seen when the group controls information by repeated warnings to stay away from the Internet, or any material criticizing the church. Such criticism of the group gets deceitfully redefined as persecution. Also, people outside their group are viewed with an eye of suspicion since they are not "committed" to being disciples and are lost and going to hell. Also, living only in places where the movement has churches is common.

Even the leaders themselves cannot get other leaders or members to read their own essays and research papers. Marty Wooten, a former kingdom evangelist, teacher, and elder, published an essay on tithing nearly ten years ago. It was a wonderfully researched and well-written piece that got to the root of the movement's problem with teaching Old

Testament doctrines on giving. Several years after writing the paper, he admitted that the paper was ignored by the leadership, especially the World Sector leaders who had been given a copy.

Therefore, in their thinking, it is okay to control, cover-up, move, manipulate, or scare people if the end result means recruiting or retaining more members or getting more money.

Category 5: Sacred Science

The group's pet doctrines or philosophy is considered to be the ultimate truth. It is beyond all question and cannot be disputed.

The best way to see the movement's use of this method is by their exclusive teachings and the idea that they are the only "committed" group out there. They reinforce this belief through the following teachings: "the church is the kingdom of God," and the ICOC is the "one true church." These are forms of sacred science. The idea of remnant theology, progressive revelation, one-generation evangelization of the world, the idolization of Kip McKean as an "apostle-like figure," and the idea that submission to a human discipler was a command of God, all fall into this category, as well.

Sacred science is really a method that makes myths seem real. It is responsible for the movement's claim that they alone have the true path to salvation. The four greatest reasons that most people endure all the false teaching and abuse within the ICOC today, other than the "friends" they have, are: (1) an irrational belief that they are the one true church, (2) that the church is the kingdom of God, (3) that leaving the church is tantamount to leaving God and going to hell, and (4) they are the only committed disciples or true followers of God in the world today.

Therefore, in their thinking, idolatry and being deceitful is fine. It is okay not to tell the whole truth about something, and to manipulate and scare people, if the end result means recruiting or retaining more members and getting more money.

Category 3: Demand for Purity

Black and white thinking, in or out, heaven or hell, Christian=Disciple=Saved, reconstructions and "gleaning the remnant," and "disciple's baptism" are all part of this methodology. This leads to a group atmosphere that is purged of any impurities—anything that conflicts with the group's way of doing things. Most of the rules presented during *Counting the Cost* fell under this category. These include daily evangelism, attendance at all group functions, imitating one's discipler, dating rules, and the like.

"The ends justify the means" thinking says that it is okay to use fear and guilt, it is okay to deceive and teach falsehood, and to manipulate and control people with law-keeping because the end result means recruiting or retaining more members and getting more money.

The betrayal of “make it work” and “the ends justify the means” has had a profoundly negative impact on the movement and anyone associated with it. I can see in a hypothetical kind of way that this philosophy might be acceptable in rare incidents. For example, if someone put a gun to your head and told you to say that you were fifty instead of forty years old in order to spare your life, you would probably do it.

What the ICOC did, however, was far different in that it trampled all over other people, the Christian faith and the gospel in order to reach its goals.

The topic of what constitutes a healthy faith and an error-free walk with Christ will be briefly mentioned in section four of this analysis. Paul outlined several key elements that every Christian has at their disposal to confront all false teaching in (Col. 2:6-7; Eph. 3:16-19).

Summary

Nearly all heretics claim to have new revelation beyond the teachings of the apostles. The bible is clear that there are no special insights, hidden discoveries, progressive revelations, or applications that would add to the inspired word of God. The ICOC used extracanonical authority to bolster their claim that God had revealed a special truth to them and no one else. Like the Gnostics, the ICOC claimed to have special knowledge in order to lure people into their fold.

The ICOC has tried to redefine and distort the concepts of repentance and baptism. They have been lying to themselves and to others by insisting their doctrines and methods come from the bible and not themselves. These false teachers have seduced and deceived prospective members through their hollow and deceptive philosophy in order to enslave them into their system of corrupt human traditions and rule-keeping.

The worldwide fellowship of churches has been ravaged by these false teachers and their philosophy of error. The most noted of these were activism/legalism and the “ends justify the means” approach to growth and change. Lesser, but nonetheless harmful, are the ideas of conformism and seeking the praise and approval from others. False philosophies and methodologies like these deceive, distort, and enslave their listeners.

The standard set out in Colossians 2:8 outlines the fundamental corruption of the ICOC and the source of their heretical problems in relation to sound biblical faith and union with Christ. Some of their traditions [paradosis,] are handed down through an indoctrination manual called *First Principles* and include irrelevant, but mandatory meritorious works that have been added to the gospel.

Although stated somewhat informally, other traditions and creeds began surfacing in Boston Bulletin articles like the five-part series entitled “*Progressive Revelation*,” 1988.

There is no proof that the movement's leaders deliberately set out to create the thought-reform environment that is prevalent today but nonetheless it exists and the leaders are responsible. This environment or culture of control has shipwrecked the faith of countless Christians. Thought-reform is a "quick-fix" that produces immediate results that don't last long. Real transformation comes from Christ alone (Col. 2:6-7).

As a group, they chose to establish their own in-house training program through the study series *First Principles*, written by Kip McKean. McKean and the early Boston leaders have been warned numerous times to stop teaching heresy. McKean was fired for ignoring one of these warnings. After dropping out of bible school, McKean continued to use corrupt discipling methods, and together with a hollow and deceptive philosophy, created and refined the false teachings contained in the *First Principles* series. The entire organization of the ICOC has been built upon this uninspired pre-baptismal study and until McKean stepped down, it was its sole source to recruit, train, and retain its followers.

McKean has reproduced the only kind of leader this assembly-line system has ever produced—other false teachers like himself.

The *First Principles* study series is little more than a blueprint on how to convert people through works and legalism into a man-made system of more works and legalism. Although the Spirit is given at baptism, there remains little hope to those seeking a pure walk with God before the demands of rule-keeping and self-justification enslave them to the "other gospel" of the organization.

In his book, *From Slavery to Sonship*, Jones states two primary reasons why young Christians accept a false gospel:

The gospel that the Galatians bought appealed to their desire for human achievement. It is part of the American dream to get what you want the old-fashioned way—by earning it...the new gospel declared salvation as a result of law-keeping.⁴⁶

This desire for human achievement comes from an errant philosophy and is known as activism/legalism. Activists seek fulfillment from work rather than from God. Those charmed into pursuing this plan instead of God's plan would end up frustrated, fearful, and fatigued. New Christians might also accept a false gospel through the use of "fine sounding arguments" like those employed by the false teachers at Colosse.

The ICOC tries very hard to portray itself as fun, caring, and safe. They do their best to surround new prospects with flattering attention while serving them and meeting their needs. Appearances can be deceiving. The false teaching and false religion being promoted by the ICOC has an "appearance of wisdom" (Col. 2:23) but is really hollow and empty.

Section II: Disciple's Baptism Becomes "Another Gospel"

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved' (Acts 15:1).

Unfortunately, the movement did not heed the many warnings delivered by brethren in the Central Church or any other Church of Christ. It was during this time that some of the teachings, derivations of ideas and practices begun at the Crossroads church, began to accelerate and take shape. The Boston Movement has its roots in the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida. The Crossroads leadership took a stand against the Boston Movement in June 1988, opposing their unbiblical practices.

Once again, the movement's answer to these departures was that God had revealed "what is perhaps the most significant discovery in centuries" regarding salvation, church plantings, discipleship partners, training of ministers through discipling relationships, church reconstructions, "disciple's baptism," and evangelists discipling elders.⁴⁷ These discoveries were outlined in a series of articles entitled "*Progressive Revelation*" which were written by Gordon Ferguson, elder and evangelist in the Boston Church of Christ. The escalation of doctrinal changes from 1986 to 1990 was unbelievable.

It's worth noting that the experiences mentioned in this section have been meticulously documented by one of the former leaders of the Boston church, Jerry Jones, Th.D. Jones became a part of the Boston church in 1984 and eventually was appointed an elder in April 1986. Although Jones resigned his position six months after being appointed, he has since written a three-volume series of books cataloging Boston material produced mainly by its leaders. With the intent of explaining what the Boston Movement teaches and assisting others in understanding what the scriptures teach on such matters, he has used both written and spoken primary source data in all three volumes of *What Does the Boston Movement Teach?*

Much of the material in this section has been excerpted from Jones' work.

Countdown to Heresy

These new controversial teachings marked a major shift in the Boston Movement, especially concerning baptism. It is interesting to note what Kip McKean taught about conversion and the place of baptism prior to 1986.

Both in the 1982 Boston World Missions Seminar, and at the Youth Forum of the Florida Evangelism Seminar in 1984, he gave similar lessons on becoming a Christian. His message didn't change even as late as 1985 where he gave yet another speech about making disciples, this time to his own congregation in Boston. In it he stated:

We can never compromise the issue of salvation-what it takes to be saved. You have to have faith, repent, confess and be baptized. That's just how it is.⁴⁸

Simple enough, but just two years later, in a lesson entitled "Be Perfectly United," he said that someone seeking a relationship with God needed to be a disciple *before* baptism or his baptism was invalid. This statement was made during a 1987 Boston Women's Retreat.

For a long time in the church of Christ and those that were raised in it have been taught, dare we say, the five point plan of salvation—hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized. Though I believe in that because I believe in the word of God, I believe an essential element has not been emphasized in the area of repentance. In fact, it was the primary area that Jesus emphasized about this baptism. In Matthew 28:19 when Jesus appeared to the eleven on the Mount before he ascended, he said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing **THEM** (there they are) baptizing **THEM** in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey my Father's commands.' I really believe, sisters, we need to get it on straight who is a candidate for baptism. It is the individual who **IS** a disciple.⁴⁹

McKean appeared to attribute the source of this new doctrine to the Holy Spirit when he said that *new* truths were not being revealed, but that *old* truths were becoming clearer. He went on to say that he wasn't adding things to the scriptures. In my estimation, this is not a biblical understanding of Matthew 28:19, but must be viewed as a new false teaching on the requirements for salvation. The Boston leadership was in essence saying that the gospel was insufficient to save apart from human effort. They still have the same perverted view today.

Dave Anderson, host of *RightCyberUp*, gave a very compelling analysis of this same passage in a paper entitled *The ICC Bible Studies: A Critical Analysis*, published online in 2002. It was later translated into German and Spanish and has been used around the world to help current and former members understand the expressions and special meanings behind the movement's abusive and misleading study series *First Principles*.

This interpretation of Matthew 28:19 hinged on the pronoun "them," which McKean interpreted to mean "disciples." But this interpretation is wrong for at least two reasons: The original Greek for "make disciples" (*matheteuo*) in Matthew 28:19 is a single word (verb), not two words (verb + object). This changes everything: "them" can't possibly mean "disciples"—"them" is referring to the "nations." It would have been more grammatically correct for Kip McKean to teach: "*You must become a **nation** first, and then get baptized.*" (Of course, it's absurd to say that a person can become a nation.)

Matthew 28:19 by its very grammar can't be used to support pre-baptism requirements for individuals ("disciples"). Pre-baptism commitment may be a noble thing, but the ICOC's exclusive interpretation of this Bible verse is unsupportable.⁵⁰

I believe this new doctrine of “disciple’s baptism” served the Boston Movement in several key ways. First, it gave McKean and his leaders what they wanted, an exclusive new way to be different and better than anyone else. Large numbers of seekers were fooled into thinking they had to be disciples before baptism. Secondly, it allowed them to entice newcomers and existing members into thinking the movement was the “only true church,” since nobody else was teaching this newly revealed message.

But most important of all, it also gave the leadership what they ultimately wanted—control over the converts who bought into “disciple’s baptism,” since it was the ICOC who arbitrarily set the rules of discipleship in the first place. The net result—they would become enslaved to a controlled, routine religion. Large amounts of money began funneling into the organization.

Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them (Ga. 4:17).

Just as the false teachers in Galatia were trying to alienate Paul’s converts and get them to be devoted to them, the false teachers of the emerging Boston church acted likewise. We can get a pretty good idea from scripture that Paul’s opponents, the Judaizers, probably used the Old Testament to persuade the Galatians to accept a “different gospel.” Primary source data such as books, tapes, sermons, and diaries, together with the analysis contained here, show the Boston Movement used Matthew 28:19 as a flagship to justify their own counterfeit gospel.

It was during this time of rapid change that Al Baird, an elder in the Boston Church of Christ, and many others, began teaching this divisive message to Boston-affiliated churches around the world. In September of 1987, Baird taught a class on “Go and Baptize Disciples Only.” The following quote is from Elena McKean (Kip McKean’s wife) in the December, 1987 issue of the Boston Bulletin, entitled “Satan Masquerades As An Angel:”

Too few churches call people to make the decision to be disciples at baptism (Matthew 28:19). **Jesus says if you have not done this, your baptism is invalid.** Many people even in the ‘church of Christ’ are deceived. Only baptized disciples will be willing to go anywhere, do anything, and give up everything for the cause of winning the world for a few of the lies Satan spread about the critical area of salvation.⁵¹

The new teaching quickly found its way into the Boston church and its affiliates. In 1987 and 1988, a wave of rebaptisms and “reconstructions” had begun. It is interesting to note that quite a few prominent elders and Boston Movement leaders were rebaptized at this

point in time. The following explanation concerning this “about face” on the requirements for salvation was given by Roger Lamb, who served as one of the elders in the Chicago Church of Christ. He wrote several telling statements about his view of baptism prior to his own rebaptism in September of 1987. In a March 22, 1987 issue in the Chicago Fire, a congregational bulletin, Lamb expressed:

We are simply a group of sinners who have admitted our guilt, repented of our sins, been baptized into Christ and been washed by the blood of his sacrifice.⁵²

Notice that nothing was said about the necessity of being a disciple prior to baptism. Later, in a leadership workshop entitled “Baptize Disciples,” Lamb stated that both he and his wife (Marcia) were “unredeemed” sinners during their initial conversion.⁵³ Lamb was rebaptized by McKean in September of 1987 due to Boston’s teaching on “disciple’s baptism.”

The Boston Movement/ICOC teach that baptism is the point in time where remission or washing away of sins occur. Hence, to declare someone’s baptism as invalid is to say an individual is not saved and is still in a state of separation from God. This view is not supported by scripture.

Al Baird was “rebaptized” in April of the same year. As stated in *What Does The Boston Movement Teach*, by Jerry Jones, “Al Baird’s “rebaptism” was not public knowledge until at least 10 months later.”⁵⁴

As acting elder of the Boston church, Al had the urgent responsibility to discuss this major event in light of I Timothy 3:6, “He must not be a recent convert.” In any case it came to pass that neither Roger nor Al needed to resign as elders. According to Jones, Roger claimed “convert” status ten years prior to his rebaptism while Al said that he didn’t think the teaching of I Timothy 3 applied to his situation. Interestingly, Al Baird still maintains that his baptism was not “hidden,” as stated by Jones in a telephone interview on October, 29, 2004.⁵⁵

It was during this time in the movement, as stated by Jones, that there were only two churches (San Diego and Boston) that had elders. With five elders between them, four had been rebaptized, along with their wives, with Bob and Pat Gempel mysteriously abstaining.

Even yet, in the April 1992 issue of *UpsideDown*, McKean wrote an article entitled “Revolution Through Restoration” in which he gave additional insights as to the kinds of people being rebaptized at Boston during the mid-eighties:

...in the ensuing two years I made a concerted effort to reach out to the leaders of this campus ministry element of the Church of Christ. Many moved to Boston.⁵⁶

It was during this time in 1985, according to McKean, that Chuck Lucas left the ministry for personal reasons. Lucas' departure left a void in leadership for nearly 50 congregations associated with the Crossroads campus ministry movement. As stated by McKean, many former leaders in different elements of the Churches of Christ came to train in Boston. McKean wrote:

Many of the men who were leaders in the different elements of the Churches of Christ, who came to train to build churches of disciples, discovered they had not been baptized as disciples themselves.⁵⁷

Previous to joining up with the Boston Movement, the majority of these men had bible training in conservative colleges and schools all over the United States. More importantly, all of them had taught that the plan of salvation had no man-made prerequisites whatsoever. All of them taught and converted using the five-point plan of salvation—hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized as witnessed in the book of Acts. Being a disciple before baptism was not taught in mainline Churches of Christ, was not taught in the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville, and was not taught by Chuck Lucas, McKean's former teacher and discipler. Lucas himself stated:

Faith, repentance and confession are essential prerequisites of baptism for the forgiveness of sins.⁵⁸

These statements were made in the November 1981 issue of *Firm Foundation*. The article, entitled "An Open Letter," written by Lucas, was addressed to the brotherhood of the Churches of Christ in which he stated:

I have never believed, taught nor sanctioned the following: That baptism should be withheld from penitent believers until human demands or standards are satisfied.⁵⁹

Speaking of human demands or standards, the Boston Movement's stance on baptism is a clear example of how they have departed from New Testament teachings and altered the gospel of Jesus by putting their own qualifications into the process. The lack of evidence for the Boston Movement's position on "disciple's baptism" is proof of their false teaching in this gospel area. No one has the right to update the gospel, to amend it, to put their unique stamp or spin on it, or to alter it in any way. Jesus didn't teach "disciple's baptism" as practiced by the Boston Movement nor are any examples of it found in the book of Acts. It is not found anywhere in the New Testament. It is simply bad exegesis of Matthew 28:18-20.

It was at this time that Boston began to point toward their own growth rate as positive proof they were God's modern-day movement. For those who were not fooled by outward appearances, they saw this as boasting in the flesh rather than the cross.

In his book, *From Slavery to Sonship*, Jones reflects on the arrival of the false teachers in Galatia by saying:

The Christians had accepted a gospel based on external measurements as a guide to spirituality; hence, because of man's prideful tendencies, they were becoming competitive with one another. "Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else" (Ga. 6:4). Comparing externals (regardless of how true or impressive they might be) doesn't meet with God's approval. It wasn't the boasting Pharisee, but the humble tax collector who "went home justified before God" (Lk. 18:14).⁶⁰

He further explains:

The problem created by the Judaizers centered on the essential nature of the gospel—did it need any additions in order for it to save men? When you buy a gospel based on meritorious works, you will never have peace. When you view your Christian works as being meritorious, you fall into the same trap as the Galatian Christians with their works of the law.⁶¹

In discussing the rash of rebaptisms at the leadership level, McKean states:

In the world's eyes—they were rebaptized. In God's eyes, they were baptized into Jesus Christ.⁶²

*Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may **boast about your flesh** (Ga. 6:13).*

What these leaders probably didn't realize, but should have, is that they were not being baptized into Christ, because that had already occurred at their first baptism. It was a "wrong turn" and an initiation into the "other gospel" that the Boston Movement had begun to advocate, namely works-based salvation both before and after conversion. Here are some of the new converts listed by McKean:

Nick Young, Preston Shepherd, Willie Flores, John Bringardner, Jerry Jordan, Reese Neyland, Bill Hooper, John Mannel, Dave Peden, Mike Taliaferro, Steve Kinnard, Steve Sapp, Steve Brown, John Lusk, Curt Simmons, Mike Rock, Scott Green, Grant Henley, Ed Powers, Andy Fleming, Gordon Ferguson, Tom Jones, Jeff Tabor, Ed Heinlein, Kevin Robbins, Roy Larson, Dr. Richard Rheinbolt, Tom McCurry, John Reus, Gregg Marutzky, Gregg Metten, Barry Mahfood, Mike Leatherwood, Sonny Sessions and Joe Garmon.⁶³

These men would soon be asked to peddle this false gospel to their congregations outside of Boston or to a new area altogether. They would begin to preach what they had learned while in Boston—that the gospel was not sufficient to save apart from the human effort involved in becoming a disciple prior to baptism, although not in those words. Back at home, they would "raise up" and train other potential leaders and interns who would in-

turn imitate and practice the same perverted and abusive techniques and methodology. Many would accept this new twist on the gospel without realizing the seriousness and the consequences of it.

History would show that leaders who chose to stay in the movement would become as legalistic and self-righteous as the Pharisees in Jesus' days. They would "tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders" and "shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces" (Mt. 23:4,13). They would become "full of greed," "blind guides," and unwilling to "practice what they preach." (Mt. 23:3, 16, 25). They would devise all sorts of religious explanations and hollow arguments to cover up their false teachings in order for them to "appear to people as righteous" (v.23).

By the same token, according to McKean, others chose not to be rebaptized because "they felt they had made the decision to be disciples when they were baptized."

Dr. George Gurganus, Sam Laing, Cecil Wooten, Jim Blough, Marty Fuqua, Dr. Marty Wooten, Ryan Howard, Henry Kreite, Joe Woods, Jess Asper, Ed Townsend, Jimmy Allen, Jr., Jimmy Rogers, John Porter, Dave Eastman, Tom Brown, Dave Weger, Phil Lamb, Bruce Williams, Randy McKean, Mike Fontenot, Douglas Jacoby, Ron Drabot, Mark Mancini, Wyndham Shaw, Gerry Federick, John Partington, Sam Powell, Tom Marks, Steve Gooch, Tim Huffman, Martin Bentley, Camaron Corr and Dr. Jerry Jones (who later left the Boston Movement).⁶⁴

Boston Chooses "works model" over "grace model"

So what's the point in all this? These leaders had a fundamental change in their basic and long held beliefs. All of these men believed in the plan of salvation as applied in the book of Acts as summarized below:

1. Hear the message—Romans 10:17, Acts 11:14
2. Believe—John 3:16, Acts 16:31
3. Repent—Luke 13:3, Acts 3:19
4. Confess Jesus as Lord—Romans 10:9, I Timothy 6:12
5. Be immersed—Acts 2:38, I Peter 3:21 (17)

Now, however, they had adopted a human-effort gospel that looked something like this:

1. Hear the message
2. Believe
3. Disciple's Repentance—Seekers had to demonstrate and prove "advanced level" changes in irrelevant and unrelated areas of their lives in order to be baptized. The group used three individual studies to weigh down newcomers-Repentance, Lordship, and Counting the Cost. Failure to perform and appear broken before leadership in any area meant you had a "bad heart" and were unworthy of God's grace. The group's idea of repentance was that one must perform the deeds of an already saved Christian before they

had even become one, and without the power of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 3:18). Even Paul himself did not meet these requirements nor did any of the other conversions in the book of Acts.

In fact, every time God's plan of salvation is presented, the seeker is told "that they should repent and turn to God," performing deeds appropriate to repentance (Acts 26:19-20). Thus, *turning to the Lord* follows repentance and occurs at baptism (Acts 2:38). By looking further into Saul's conversion in Acts 9:17-22, we see that he was not expected to give a works demonstration of repentance before being saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul did make a decision to change but his repentance was one that was appropriate in that it initially began at baptism. The deeds came afterward.

An Old Testament illustration of trying to transform oneself outside God's plan can be seen in the changes in Moses' face when the Lord descended in a cloud and spoke to him in the tabernacle. In Jay Wilson's book *Cleansing the Inside of the Cup*, he says:

The question here is, "How much work could Moses do to make his face shine?" The answer, of course, is that Moses could never do enough work to change his face; it took an act of divine power to transform his countenance. In the same way, there is no amount of work we in our age can do to make our "spiritual faces" shine; it takes an act of divine power to transform our spiritual countenances.

Those changes and attempted changes which a person makes outside the transformation connected with beholding the Lord are the "dead works" of the Law (Heb. 6:1). Those changes are humanly possible changes which effect the external performance of the individual. But the transformation which God recognizes is that which the Holy Spirit accomplishes when the Christian beholds the glory of the Lord.⁶⁵

In the end, the movement's practice of "disciple's repentance" would simply be works salvation. It was a laundry list of uninspired obligations one had to do in order to produce cheap, visible zeal, and the outward appearance of righteousness. All who passed through these gates would become guilt-motivated, works-oriented Christians, without realizing it until later, sometimes much later.

This teaching is clearly a perversion of the gospel. The elders, evangelists, and interns used this deception, directly or indirectly, as many as several times in a day when doing individual bible studies with newcomers, to show that only their church was repenting correctly. They also preached it from the pulpit in an arrogant and exclusive manner as if to prove they were better than everyone else. This was a very damaging and abusive teaching used by the false teachers to gain more converts. It also met their need, consciously or unconsciously, to manipulate and control people for personal emotional gain in the name of discipling.

4. Confess

5. Disciple's Baptism (immersion)—Seekers had to demonstrate and prove “advanced level” changes in irrelevant and unrelated areas of their lives in order to be baptized. The group used at least four individual studies to weigh down newcomers with their confusing definition of “disciple”—*Discipleship, Repentance, Lordship, and Counting the Cost*. Failure to perform and appear broken before leadership in any one area often meant you had a “bad heart” and were unworthy of God's grace. Converts were expected to perform the deeds of an already saved Christian before they had even become one, and without the power of the Holy Spirit. This concept can't be found anywhere in the bible.

Once again, this call to conversion limited baptism to those who would give a works demonstration of repentance and who would “walk as a disciple” before they could become disciples (based on Matthew 28:19. “... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing *them* ...”).

Which gospel sounds like *good news* to you? Either the group that taught the need to have faith, repent, confess and be baptized, the pre-1986 group, are false teachers or the add-on group of post-1986 are false teachers. Either way, one of the teachings was “another gospel.” Obviously, the Boston Movement/ICOC took the course of heresy.

There is no doubt as to the sincerity of this group, but I believe this gathering of false teachers, in their willful ignorance, did not realize they were teaching falsehood. After all, like the Judaizers, they weren't wrong on all doctrinal points.

However, as the methods being described here bore “fruit,” there would be a moment of realization and conscious acceptance. Any misgivings about this new teaching would soon become lost in a cycle of compromise and nagging doubt. They would choose a “system” of forced discipleship and take on a program of total control of all aspects of the disciple's life in hopes to perfect the gospel and “duplicate” the persona of Kip McKean in every one of their members.

This new teaching was a triumph of method and organization; indeed, the Boston leaders and their successors would know of no other “way” to the Father. It would become a controlled, routine religion and seem “normal” to them.

Leaders Try to Hide Their Heresy

In order to avoid criticism of what the leadership already knew—that they were adding to the gospel—they introduced two arguments to make it appear as though candidates weren't mandated to give a works demonstration of discipleship but just needed to make a “decision” to be disciples. This theological sales pitch fooled many into “buying into” discipleship.

The primary argument, espoused by Gordon Ferguson and other Boston leaders, explained “disciple's baptism” as follows:

Does a person already have to be doing all that a disciple does before he can be baptized? No, but he does have to make the decision to do all that Christ commands. And if he is not putting into practice what he is learning as he learns it, the question of whether he has a disciple's heart would be raised.⁶⁶

This was nothing more than manipulation and hollow philosophy. To use a dating analogy, it would sound something like this: "If you really want to be my boyfriend you don't need to buy me this diamond ring but if you really loved me, you would want to get it for me." There would be two choices for the boyfriend—get the ring and win her approval or withhold the ring and possibly get dumped. To add more pressure to the situation, she might add: "It doesn't seem that you have a heart to love me so I'm going elsewhere to find someone who really cares. Goodbye."

This statement shows that it was not an option but a "must-do" command of leadership that forced the newcomer to jump through man-made hoops of discipleship *before* baptism as taught by the Boston system of works-salvation. Eternal damnation with nowhere else to turn was heavily implied here.

Likewise, in his editorial "Revolution Through Restoration," Kip McKean said that "to be baptized, you must first make the *decision* to be a disciple and then be baptized."⁶⁷ Again, this is not the practice that he or any other Boston/ICOC leader preached. Rather, they have preached that one must *be* a disciple *before* baptism in order to be saved.

The reality is that, since 1986, the movement has not taught anything other than one must perform the works of a saved disciple prior to baptism in order to be saved—a blatant false doctrine about salvation—and all attempts to make this prerequisite more palatable is a cover-up. Simply put, if the seeker wasn't performing up to "hard core" standards in most every area, they would not be baptized. There would be very few exceptions to this reality. They were basically saying, "You cannot be saved unless you accept our teaching," thus, standing in the place of God. There is simply no record of any Boston/ICOC evangelist, elder, or intern teaching anything different.

I find it alarming that the movement has only three scriptures to support its stance on "disciple's baptism." They are John 4:1-2, Acts 19:1-5, and of course, Matthew 28:18-20. I find it even more disturbing that none of these substantiate the doctrine they teach.

The passage in the Gospel of John cannot be saying what the Boston Movement wants it to say, because this baptism was instituted by John the Baptist to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. This was a baptism of repentance under the old covenant and does not refer to a Christian conversion or the "one baptism" spoken of in Ephesians 4:5. In other words, there is no way that this passage could be saying what the Boston church implied it was saying. The same would be true of the other two passages when one takes a closer look.

So far, we have looked into the baptism commanded by Jesus (The Great Commission), and to John the Baptist's baptism. There was a third variety for Jewish proselytes. All of these different baptisms do not support the movement's stance on "disciple's baptism." The passage in the nineteenth chapter of Acts does not either.

They tried to create their own covenant that required the convert to do all the things necessary for those who have already been baptized before being baptized themselves. This front-loading was done because the movement's leadership does not understand grace or trust the Holy Spirit. They have a great disdain for the members in that they presupposed none would be zealous after conversion if the motivation were through grace, aside from works. So they tried to control everything by creating a more "perfect" gospel. In the Boston system, you had to come to God with no problems and no weaknesses or imperfections but totally performing as a mature, seasoned follower of God, otherwise you weren't seen as deserving a new life and would be found wanting during a cost-counting.

There would be no baptism or salvation for those who came to the ICOC with problems of poor performance. McKean's plan of having "a true church...composed only of disciples" was now a reality.⁶⁸

Summary

The Boston Movement radically changed from pre-1986 to post-1986. Prior to 1986, they had taught using the authority of the scriptures as a guide and agreed completely with the Churches of Christ regarding the process of conversion as shown in the book of Acts. They had correctly taught that there was no other justification for salvation than by grace. They agreed with Paul in that salvation could not be merited or earned by man's own righteousness or law. God's grace had been the agent of their original calling (1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4; 6:18).

However, Boston's teaching about salvation changed in the post-1986 era. The leadership sought to establish their own righteousness and would no longer submit to God's righteousness. They perverted what is known as the doctrine of liberty (saved by grace, not law).

Most of the followers coming into the ICOC had never come in contact with the kind of gospel Paul preached. They never began with the true gospel so when they came into the movement and responded to the gospel that was preached, a departure was not taking place. Still, there are fundamentals to be gleaned from the experience in Galatia.

After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Ga. 3:3).

Bear in mind that the "Spirit" and the phrase "human effort" ("flesh," KJV) are polar opposites. It would be totally absurd for man to tell God how to improve the redemptive process by usurping God's role in the grand plan of salvation. By insisting on "disciple's

baptism,” that is exactly what happened. “Flesh” is a word used to refer to the human nature when it is deprived of the Spirit of God or overcome by physical desires (Ro 7:5). In their book, *Bible Dictionary*, Murphey et al. define flesh and Spirit together.

Flesh represents the sinful nature, urges, and lusts (Eph. 2:3) that cannot please God (Ro. 8:8). Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:19-23).⁶⁹

A second question worth asking:

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? (Ga. 3:2).

This passage seemed to be used by Paul to get the Galatians to remember their own conversions. Jones’ comments on this passage in *From Slavery to Sonship*, point to the hopelessness of man’s efforts to help God improve his own gospel.

Did they receive the Spirit as a result of law or as a result of “hearing with faith” (NASV)? The Spirit is given to all who become Christians (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Eph. 1:13-14). Man’s role in the redemptive process is to receive, not to seize or achieve (Acts 2:41; I Cor. 4:7; 15:3).⁷⁰

The Boston Movement’s teaching on “disciple’s baptism” is a reversal of the gospel in that the task of salvation is on man (human effort) instead of Jesus. Their idea of adding onto baptism was equal to any law the Judaizers came up with and was equally as destructive. Paul declared that those who were preaching a different gospel should be eternally condemned.

The Boston leaders must have seen this new gospel as very appealing or wouldn’t have bought into it. It would quickly produce visible, but temporary, results in the form of church growth, commitment, and zeal. The Boston Movement’s teaching on “disciple’s baptism” is an example of having a presupposition, and then searching the scriptures in order to justify it. It is also an example of leadership giving in to the temptation for man to trust in his own righteousness.

Once more, the Boston Movement did not consider “disciple’s baptism” as being optional for Christians; in fact, they viewed it as a necessary addition to the gospel.

Although it is hard to pinpoint the exact time in which the Boston Movement changed its stance on salvation by requiring a prerequisite to be added, namely “disciple’s baptism,” the ramifications are frightening! When this doctrine was placed in the hands of elders, evangelists, House Church leaders, Bible Talk leaders, and disciplers, it would mark the beginning of a very abusive and tumultuous time for the group. It would also mark a key turning point for the Boston Movement leadership, making all who taught this doctrine—past, present, and future—modern-day false teachers.

A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough (Ga. 5:19).

The *yeast* here would be the false teaching of the movement and the *batch of dough* is the church. This exclusive new doctrine caught on quickly and its influence was felt, as large numbers would accept the false gospel, particularly new Christians. No doubt the persuasiveness of McKean and his core group of leaders probably made this gospel alluring and exciting.

To anyone associated with the Boston Movement/ICOC, it should come as no surprise that some of their “hard teachings” (John 6:60) are really false teachings. They have learned to disguise and twist many worthy biblical principles through their use of a confusing array of terms, phrases, and slogans unique to the group. This type of disingenuous phrasing was addressed by Paul when he spoke of “fine-sounding arguments” (Col. 2:4) being used to promote man-centered doctrines that had “an appearance of wisdom” (Col. 2:23).

In his book, *From Slavery to Sonship*, Jones says some things about Paul and the false teachers of Galatia (Ga. 1:6-10):

The Galatians had accepted a different gospel. Two words for *different* could have been used. One word (*allos*) means “different in the sense of another of the same kind.” Your watch can be different from mine, but it is still a watch. A second word for different (*heteros*) means “another of a different kind.” Paul used the latter word to mark the contrast between his gospel and the one the Galatians had accepted. That is why Paul quickly added that this different gospel was really no gospel at all.⁷¹

Noteworthy too, is the word “deserting” as it is used in a way to show a defection of someone going over to the side of the enemy. The defection is from “Him” who called you by grace. Paul’s enemies were those who would attempt to replace the spiritual life of grace and peace with a religious system of imposed works.

Jones further elaborates on the same section of text by explaining what perverting the gospel means. He says:

Pervert means to “reverse or change to its very opposite.” It is used only two other times in the Bible. Acts 2:20 speaks of the sun being turned into darkness, and James 4:9 speaks of laughter turned into mourning. Paul’s opponents had reversed the very nature of the gospel. The law from Mount Sinai was a “do and live” religion. After doing or performing, you earned a right to life (Ga. 3:12). The covenant from Mount Calvary is a “live and do” religion. Because you have been given life, you perform or do. You serve because you are saved, not in order to be saved.⁷²

As Christians, we need to be on guard against the introduction of drastic new ideas or the subtle use of formulas that, in the wrong hands, can be used to pressure good people into

a life of imposed works. Not only is “disciple’s baptism” unbiblical, but it places the burden of salvation on man through works instead of being saved by grace through faith. This is a reversing of the covenant of Jesus. Therefore, it is not God’s will for our lives and must be identified as a false teaching and “another gospel” [*heteros*].

Salvation is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). A gift by its very nature can’t be paid for and have it still remain a gift. Man is saved by grace in spite of, not because of, his deeds. Jesus taught about life oriented in grace, but the false teachers in Galatia taught a quality of life that came from human expectations and works. Works are excluded from the way of salvation (Ro. 3:27; 4:3-4; and 11:6).

In his article *Identifying God’s Remnant*, Tom Yoakum wrote this about groups seeking remnant status through another gospel (Ga. 2:11-14):

It ought to be confronted with the same directness with which Paul confronted Peter when the imposition of circumcision and its attendant legal demands caused a rupture in the fellowship at Antioch. When the call to conversion limits baptism to those who give a works demonstration of repentance and who “walk as a disciple” before they can become disciples, it is no longer a remnant called by grace through faith.⁷³

Boston chose a “works model” instead of a “grace model” for salvation. Their works approach to salvation (disciple’s baptism; disciple’s repentance; counting the cost) was no different than “the imposition of circumcision” sought by the false brothers in Galatia. Just as their gospel came with a host of “legal demands” to live by, so too has Boston’s gospel come with their legal system of codes and human standards to live by. There would be no other way of approaching Christ for the Boston Movement/ICOC, either in coming to Christ (justification) or in living for Him (sanctification).

The following chart might help in choosing which gospel is true and which is a counterfeit.

Which gospel is the true one? (Gal. 1:11-12)	
1. “...the gospel I preached is not something that man made up”	1. Gordon Ferguson and the top leaders made it up. “ <i>Progressive Revelation: Disciple’s Baptism</i> ” Part IV, May 29, 1988. ⁷⁴
2. “...nor was I taught it...”	2. Kip McKean taught himself the gospel of the ICOC. In his article, <i>Revolution Through Restoration</i> , UpsideDown, 1992, McKean states: “Early on <i>I developed</i> a series consisting of nine Bible studies...The most impacting was called “Discipleship” where, from <i>my study of Scripture...I taught</i> what was clear in Acts 11:26... <i>I purposely developed</i> this study to

	draw a sharp biblical distinction... <i>I taught</i> that to be baptized...” ⁷⁵
3. “...I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” [Jesus was the agent of revelation]	<p>3. The Boston Bulletin was the agent of revelation.</p> <p>The group knew there were no new revelations after the apostles. They also knew that to exegete Mt. 28:18-20 correctly and make it say what they wanted it to say, was impossible ... so in order to “make it work”—to recruit and retain more people—they relied on faulty hermeneutics.</p> <p>Gordon Ferguson states: “...the applications may vary by culture and century.” <i>“Progressive Revelation: The Concept Explained”</i> Part I, May 1, 1988.⁷⁶</p> <p>In doing so, they showed their pride in trying to “out clever” the rest of the world with their unique interpretation. Unique interpretations are usually wrong. One of the most basic rules for bible interpretation is that <i>a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or readers.</i></p> <p>But in the end, the movement not only misinterpreted Matthew 28:18-20 incorrectly but misapplied it as well.</p>

In order for us to better understand proper interpretation, let’s take a look at a passage from David Bercot’s *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*. In this passage Bercot suggests using Tertullian’s “principle of time.”

According to this principle, authority lies with the one who is prior in time. It’s based on the elemental truth that corruption (of doctrine) lies with the one who is shown to have originated later in time. Since error is falsification of truth, truth must necessarily precede error.⁷⁷

So the question becomes: Why would anyone want to choose the movement’s doctrine of “disciple’s baptism” that was first taught around the fall of 1986, nearly 1,900 years *after* the deaths of the apostles?

Section III: Motivating Believers Through the Law and not the Spirit

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal (Jas. 3:3).

In Danny Dixon's essay, "Horse-Bit" Leadership, he says:

...the horses' obedience comes by *physical force* of a hurtful instrument, not by authority or even of intellectual persuasion... "obedience" in Hebrews 13:17 is a result and outcome of the influence of the persuasion of godly leaders... [Hebrews 13:17 does] not support the idea of an authoritarian position from which arbitrary rules can be legislated simply because the elder, evangelist, or other leader in the church holds those respective "offices" or gifts of leadership (Eph. 4:11ff).⁷⁸

In this case a human-engineered bit and bridle were used as the force to get the horse to do work. The horse would only labor and put out an effort under the compelling influence of this invention.

Similar to a bit and bridle was a yoke—a device that joins together a pair of work animals. As in the case of the horse, there would be little success in getting these animals to move if they were allowed to roam free. They require a master and a strong guiding force to produce results.

Cattle Drive

As stated earlier, the ICOC added a mandatory "yoke" of their own to the qualifications of becoming a Christian—"disciple's baptism," "disciple's repentance," and "counting the cost." These add-ons required prospects to prove their worthiness by showing to the older members that they were broken and ready to accept the group's way of doing things. A parade of other rules, traditions, and expectations came through leadership's use of thought-reform as a discipling methodology.

Bear in mind that justification by faith and justification by "human effort" or law-keeping ("flesh," KJV) are polar opposites. As absurd as it may sound, the ICOC, by insisting on "disciple's baptism," was saying that man-made rules were on the same par as the gospel in their redemptive power. Jones explains the issues that make up our freedom in Christ in his commentary of the Fifth Chapter of Galatians:

The Christian who lives by faith is not going to become a rebel. Quite the contrary, he is going to experience the inner discipline of God that is far better than the outer discipline of man-made rules... The legalist is the one who eventually rebels, because he is living in bondage, depending on the flesh, living for self, and seeking the praise of men and not the glory of

God...legalism attempts to do the impossible: change the old nature and make it obey the laws of God. Legalism succeeds for a short time, and then the flesh begins to rebel.⁷⁹

The idea that righteousness is not just something we can earn or grab as a result of our own efforts, no matter how good our intentions may be, can be seen in the life of Abraham, the man of faith.

Still childless, God promised him and his wife Sarah a son, through whom he would be the “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5). As the story goes, Abraham was not blessed right away and began to have doubts about God’s promise. Abraham and Sarah began to take matters into their own hands. Their intentions were good; they wanted to build a family and see the promise fulfilled (Gen. 16:1-2). Abraham slept with Sarah’s maidservant, reasoning “...perhaps I can build a family through her...” The couple now had what they wanted, as Ishmael was born. However, God rejected this alternate plan since Ishmael was a child borne by fleshly power and not by the promise of God.

Abraham tried to reach his goal of having children through his own power—by human effort. It didn’t work, even though it produced quick, visible change. Paul expresses this idea in Galatians 3:8 when he said, “...God would justify the Gentiles by faith [not “flesh”...”]

The bottom line is that there are only two choices for a Christian: the way of faith, or the way of law-keeping. The law doesn’t accept faith alone as enough for salvation; it accepts only a blending of faith and works.

The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them’ (Gal. 3:12).

Jones’ comments on this passage are worth mentioning:

If doing or performing is the basis for receiving eternal life, the law-keeper will never receive it because he can’t be a perfect law-keeper. The law makes no provision for disobedience. It’s a self-condemning system because it’s man-centered rather than God-centered.⁸⁰

Jesus said, “My yoke is easy” (Mt. 11:30), but the movement’s leaders have become like the Pharisees, “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders” (Mt. 23:4). When a Christian has a submissive faith and freely chooses to be under the controlling power of the Holy Spirit there is simply no need for anything else. The movement, on the other hand, was trying to attain righteousness by works of the “flesh,” including “disciple’s baptism” (Ro. 8:1-4).

A “Yoke” of Law-Keeping

Jones mentions that Paul used three comparisons to explain the foolishness of trusting law as a redemptive means for salvation, none of which should be viewed positively.

The first comparison was the “child-leader” who was to serve as a guardian to keep man under the care and direction of another with little or no freedom (translated “put in charge to lead,” and “supervision” [3:24, 25]). The second comparison was the slave woman (4:22, 30-31). If you choose to be like a mother and son, you wouldn’t select Hagar and Ishmael; you would choose Sarah and Isaac who were free. The third comparison was a yoke.⁸¹

Some of the movement’s man-made rules were first introduced to prospects during their initial bible studies. The pre-baptismal study program *First Principles*, contained these nine studies: *Discipleship, Word of God, The Kingdom, Light and Darkness, The Cross, The Church, Repentance, Lordship, and Counting the Cost*.

There was some flexibility in the order that the lessons could be administered but there was little tolerance for those who did not ascribe to the group’s rules, stated or implied. This was a salvation that had to be earned by law-keeping. The bible studies were loaded with “rules taught by men” and were arranged in such a way as to confuse the seeker and make it hard for them to understand the real meaning of the passages.

Here are some of the things everyone had to submit to if they wanted to be saved:

All had to submit to a human discipler (*Discipleship Study*). In terms of attendance, the phrase, “need to” was used in the *Lordship* study and included Sunday services, midweek services, discipleship groups, devotionals, Bible jubilees, Bible Talks, retreats, seminars and conferences. Prospects had to agree to the statement “If you move, will you *only* move where there are disciples [Boston-led churches]?” (*Counting the Cost*). Regarding repentance, the *Lordship* lesson has the statement, “You must repent of all your sins for all time.” Let’s not forget that all prospects had to agree to perform and earn their right to join the group by becoming a disciple *before* they were even baptized through the statement, “Who is a candidate for baptism? Disciples (*Discipleship*).

Once again, the “lesser” heresies are not the subject of this analysis, but there were dozens of arbitrary expectations implied or inferred within this study series or behind the scenes. Biblically flawed notions or twisted scriptures were used frequently but arbitrarily, depending on who was leading the study. For instance, prospects were expected to buy into the idea that evangelism was their only purpose for living. They were frequently coerced into having to say that their friends and loved ones, living and deceased, were lost and in hell because they had not been saved correctly. Prospects were tricked into thinking that the Boston Movement/ICOC was the one true church doing things the one true way and every other group was in error.

A final check was done during *Counting the Cost* to see if the prospect was ready to join the ICOC and their system of thought-reform/discipling methodology. This lesson was a series of questions done in a panel interview format that was scary and intimidating. The oldest person in the hierarchical system would test the prospect, not to see if they were ready to follow Jesus, but the group's rules and expectations. At this time any last-minute sins were confessed to the whole group.

These sins often became public knowledge and circulated through the fellowship soon after the session was finished. Tithing "at 10%" was discussed, evangelism, and being "supportive and submissive to church leadership?" (*Counting the Cost*). Prospects who did not have a job were often told they could not be saved until they got one. Other people were told they had to stop dating their boyfriend/girlfriend. I was told that I should stop wearing my glasses and get a better looking pair. My wife was told to paint her toenails. Many were pressured into moving into a house with other disciples in order to grow spiritually.

Baptism was withheld for a number of reasons, but almost every time it was because the group's rules were not being met.

Blinded by the promise of being saved and terrified by the idea that walking away from these studies was synonymous to leaving the kingdom of God and going to hell, seekers endured this "heavy load" of human expectations. They were hooked.

The opening paragraph in the Third Chapter in Galatians (v. 1-5) pinpoints the foolishness of trying to come to God through human effort. Paul maintained that the true gospel came through faith (justification) and following the Spirit (sanctification). The false teacher's gospel relied on law (justification) and a life of imposed works (sanctification).

Some may ask, "If this is true, then why did the ICOC use human guidelines and force them upon other people?" Jones had a good answer to that question.

The yoke of the law offered a "quick fix" in producing behavioral changes and in ceasing from life-dominating sins. The changes were immediate, visual, and radical, but Paul knew from history and experience (Romans 7:12-15) that something else was required to be successful over the long haul. The outward, fleshly actions can be controlled only so long by law, for if the "want to's" aren't dealt with, a real transformation won't occur.⁸²

Legalism is very dangerous because when Christians buy into a man-made covenant they lose their footing with grace and the true gospel. The following passage illustrates this:

But by **faith** we eagerly **await** through the **Spirit** the righteousness for which we hope (Gal. 5:5).

Paul was saying that by faith (not works) we eagerly wait (not work) through the Spirit (not flesh) for the righteousness of our hope.

The ICOC had all but thrown the grace model out the window in favor of works. In trying to encourage proper Christian behavior without destroying the gospel, they failed. Grace isn't simply a theory; it's a life-style that determines how you live before God. It's a relationship, not a checklist.

The movement's leadership believed that "law" should be used to control behavior and to produce behavioral changes. They felt the focus for a Christian and the impetus for change came from the law rather than from faith in Christ. Paul called their method a "different gospel" (Ga. 1:6). The good news for us today and for all time is that justification is based on a relationship with God through faith in Christ.

There is simply no record of any elder, evangelist, or intern teaching otherwise. Therefore, they are modern-day false teachers. These false teachers' objective—behavioral changes as opposed to internal transformation—determined their method. The ICOC promised joy, prosperity, and a deep relationship with God, but behind all the pageantry it never came to pass. They merely wanted to produce a product that looked good on the outside and showed little concern about the inside.

The leadership put on a mask and tried very hard to make the ICOC appear as an honest bible church, but history has shown their real intentions to be selfish and self-serving. Their gospel is a counterfeit. They said all the right religious things and sounded very spiritual, but like the Judaizers and other false teachers throughout history, they are merely "those who want to make a good impression outwardly" (Gal. 6:12a). They didn't care who they hurt in the process. Even to this day they do not understand what they have done wrong.

Once again, their methods included the eight elements of thought-reform used among cults and abusive groups. They were what Jesus called "rules taught by men" (Mt. 15:9). Behavior modification orchestrated the "gospel" of the ICOC, despite their claims to follow the bible only. Through the use of a "hollow and deceptive philosophy," these false teachers deceived and enslaved their followers into a system of law-keeping.

Paul did not ascribe to this approach but believed just the opposite; he felt that the objective was "Christ in you" (Ga. 2:20; 4:19), out of which flowed a life in harmony and union with Christ.

Some might say, "The ICOC does have a lot of problems but they don't observe the Old Testament law." In getting his readers to understand the importance behind the law of Moses, Jones says:

Paul's attack on the law of Moses as being a system based on human merit that purports salvation isn't limited to only the Mosaical law system but includes **any man-made law-keeping system promising a relationship**

with, or approval by, God. Paul's polemic against the law of Moses is **broad enough to include any law system-past, present, or future.** The law of Moses is purely an example of the principles that Paul was challenging.⁸³

There is no distinction in the bible between making the works of the law a prerequisite to being saved and the movement's effort to make their system legalistic by insisting that prospects give a works-demonstration of discipleship to be saved. Both are adding to the gospel. There is no difference in terms of this discussion between the law or its modern-day equivalent, "legalism." They are both the same.

The situation found in the book of Galatians fits the profile of the movement like a glove. The false brothers arrived in Galatia preaching a different gospel from the one that Paul preached. Jones states:

Those Jewish brothers were simply trying to be sure that the new Christians were like them, so they weren't even aware that they were false teachers. Their evangelistic method consisted of preaching the same facts about Jesus that Paul had preached, and they also agreed with Paul's teaching on faith and baptism (3:26-27). However, they felt additional works were necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). Since these works were considered to be redemptive, the false brothers implied that the gospel of grace was insufficient. The clash between Paul and the false brothers was rooted in the essence of the gospel. Paul preached salvation by grace (plus nothing), and his opponents preached salvation by grace plus law (circumcision and ceremony).

...Paul's opponents' motivation was good. They never intended for the new Christians to keep the whole law (5:3), but just enough of the law so the new believers could have the same orientation as they did. The emphasis on law provided a checklist for the "older brothers" to decide if the new brothers were really orthodox in all their Christianity.⁸⁴

Hopefully, it is clear that the law—including legalistic rules—does not justify. In fact, it does just the opposite; it leads to the arousal of fleshly desires and passions. Rules were never meant to be used to properly motivate people. Let's remember, the law was used "to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (Ga. 3:24). The law-keeping of the ICOC is a prison for those who join the movement (Gal. 3:23).

The lesson of Galatians is there to point out the utter hopelessness of men who would try to use the power of law-keeping to transform their walk with God. That can only be done by relying on the power of God. The leadership in the ICOC are like the Pharisees because they are opposed to Paul's belief that salvation is by grace. Like the Judaizers, they insist that other works must be added to the gospel in order for salvation to take place. The ICOC do not view their laws as being optional. They are legalists in that they rest their salvation on themselves rather than on Christ.

Faith is mentioned three times in Galatians 2:16 and is essential to justification. The ICOC stood in the way of God in that man's own righteousness became their justification. Therefore, if "a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law," (Ro. 3:28) wouldn't that make many of the ICOC's teachings completely irrelevant? The answer is "yes." Once again, many are now coming to the realization that their "hard teachings" are really false teachings and "rules taught by men."⁸⁵

There is simply no excuse for the movement's insistence that works such as "disciple's baptism," "disciple's repentance," and "counting the cost" be adhered to in light of these and many other passages (Gal. 2:16, Gal. 3:19, Gal. 3:24, Acts 13:39 and John 8:34-36).

The movement's leadership has become like the Judaizers by their view that their arbitrary expectations and law-keeping are not optional. This is in direct opposition to the book of Galatians and the gospel of God (Acts 15:1, 10).

The movement claimed all along that no other group was teaching that one had to be a disciple *prior* to baptism in order to be saved. So it only makes sense that they are the only ones to blame for teaching a different (*heteros*) gospel. This "other gospel" is really no gospel at all and those leaders who taught it deserve the same judgment Paul leveled against the Jewish false teachers in Galatia when he said, "...let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:8, 9).

The ICOC chose to seek God through external measurements, productivity, and verifiable works rather than Christ formed within you (Gal. 4:19). They wanted something they could touch, see, and boast about. Paul, on the other hand, preached that man is justified "by faith apart from observing the law" (Ro. 3:28). The movement's leadership are responsible for taking this alternate path in the same way the Judaizers were responsible for taking theirs.

The Judaizers and the ICOC knew they could get more work and productivity from others by a return to slavery, and that is exactly what they did (Gal. 2:4). Both groups used the outward force of rules and law instead of an inner restraint to produce change in their followers.

A system of regulations and rules was easier for the leaders of the ICOC to teach than it was to show people how to develop a healthy relationship with God.

In their pride they relied on man, his wisdom, philosophies, creeds, and traditions. They have denied most core problems and refrained from addressing their own sinfulness while confusing issues and making up their own definitions of God's standards for right and wrong.

Having rejected God's redemptive course for their lives, these men placed man on the throne and substituted their "other gospel" in place of the one that offered the real solution to their lives and the lives of others. There is no way that man's way will ever

replace God's way but the leaders were reckless and impatient enough to try it. Their efforts were in vain.

God cannot be mocked because "a man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7). God's law of reaping and sowing apply to the physical universe or the family of believers. It's as inevitable as the rising of the sun and as real as the air we breathe. It also applies to those who would preach "another gospel."

In their quest to "outsmart" everyone else, the leadership brought devastation upon most who followed them. This was a human tragedy that shipwrecked souls and permanently damaged fragile hearts and minds. I believe that most who leave the movement will never darken the halls of any church again due to their deep sense of loss, betrayal, and warped view of God. Many feel like spiritual failures because they did not measure up to the standards of the ICOC; standards they may never know were not God's, but that of the false teachers and their law-keeping system.

In Galatians 5:2-4, Paul describes the repercussions of allowing faith in the work of Christ to be overshadowed by faith in man's ability to perform deeds of self-redemption. Paul was emphatic: "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all."

Having said that, I think it's fair to say that the Jewish false teachers and those of the ICOC believed in the same facts about Jesus that Paul taught, and they also agreed with Paul's teaching on faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27). Sadly, they both have crossed the line by crystallizing their doctrines and practices while adding a humanistic works element to the gospel (Gal. 2:21; Ro. 3:27-31).

The entry into the ICOC officially occurred at "disciple's baptism." Once again, this was not any kind of baptism practiced in the book of Acts, and was not taught by Paul, by Jesus, or anyone else. After coming through the door of this "disciple's baptism" new believers had an obligation to subscribe to the movement's ever-widening program of behavior modification and "rules taught by men."

Jones says, "...the Galatians accepted circumcision (circumcision isn't a single act but represents the principle of a works-righteousness system)." ⁸⁶ Here are four lessons we can learn about this demand to be circumcised:

The first result of accepting circumcision would be that "Christ will be of no value to you at all" (5:2b). God's gift of grace comes free of charge. It can't be earned and we do not deserve it. The movement tried to sidestep grace by trusting in themselves for salvation.

A second consequence of accepting circumcision would be the idea that more obligations would need to be met by the convert in order to stay in good standing with the group. "Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law" (Gal. 5:3). Remember, the Judaizers were only asking the believers

to obey a few ceremonial practices. After accepting part of the law, however, it would only make sense that they would be obligated to obey all the law later on.

A third consequence of accepting circumcision would be estrangement from Christ. “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ” (5:4a). Gaining God’s favor by observing the law is the polar opposite of coming to Him through grace and a submissive faith.

A fourth outcome would be falling “away from grace” (5:4b). All of man’s effort to try and justify himself through a system of law-keeping bring about separation from God’s grace. There is no other end for those who depend on their own efforts in lieu of God’s saving grace.

Works of the Flesh (Gal. 5:19-21)

Near the end of his letter, Paul’s message to the Galatians drew a sharp contrast between those who would invest (sow) either in the flesh or in the Spirit. Both justification and sanctification are the work of the Holy Spirit, while *human effort* (“the flesh”) pertains to the human nature in its unregenerate weakness.

Jones’ comments about Galatians 5:19-21 illustrate the end result of living by the gospel the Judaizers preached as opposed to the one Paul preached. These “deeds of the flesh (NASB)” are also known as “works of the flesh,” or “acts of the sinful nature (NIV).”

The false gospel centered on human merit and fleshly achievements; therefore, those who focused on the flesh would evidence it in their ungodly ways. Those who focused on the Spirit (5:16, 18, 25) would show His fruit produced in their lives. A religion of law concentrating on fleshly control will eventually fail because long-term behavioral changes will be affected only by a transformation from within (“Christ in you” [4:19; Colossians 1:27]).⁸⁷

If the “acts of the sinful nature are obvious,” then why was Galatians 5:19-21 one of the most common sermons in the movement? The answer lies in that even though it is “shameful...to mention what the disobedient do in secret” (Eph. 5:12), the leadership actually expects it to happen.

They brought up sin lists like these because the movement has always had a systemic problem of carnality among its members. The relentless sermonizing of sins of the “flesh” and the graphic nature of the sermons themselves suggest it was a serious problem, otherwise they wouldn’t keep bringing it up. By constantly getting others to feel guilty about their sins, the leaders were able to keep the focus off their own. In essence, it’s easier to exploit people when they are shamed and focused inward.

Leadership is deeply entrenched in the life-dominating sins of pride, selfishness, idolatry, and not loving other people. Imprisoned by these sins, they continue to be deceived by

them and have grown accustomed to the same kind of law-keeping and human effort gospel their members are enslaved to. The transformation that comes from God has been rejected by them in favor of legalism. They are simply going through the motions now and are numb to the suffering around them (Ro. 6:3-6; 12:2; II Co. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; Mt. 10:38-39; Lk. 9:23-24; Gal. 2:20).

They are prideful for not relying on God to build their movement. As a result of depending on their own strength and not the Spirit, they have become selfish in many ways due to their inability to resist the fleshly desires in their hearts. The pride of the leadership of the ICOC can be seen in these passages (Pr. 14:9a, 12, 16; 21:2, 24; 26:12; Is. 5:20-21; I Co. 3: 19-20; I Tim. 1:5-7; II Tim. 3:1-5).

Selfishness has become an acceptable standard for these men. Through their philosophies of human origin, they have deceived and enslaved their followers and have exploited them for their own personal gain (Gal. 4:17; II Pet. 2:3). They were lazy and undisciplined in bible study as well. They will not so much as lift a finger to expose the corruption, greed, and false teaching within the organization. Ambition is not a sin, but selfish ambition is. They have carelessly and recklessly stepped over brothers and sisters to get to the top of the pyramid and grab the rewards found there. They have destroyed the unity in the church with their self-willed opinions and doctrines causing dissension and factions amongst God's people.

In all these sins, there will be a judgment for what they have done and they will be personally held responsible for their abuse (Mt. 16:27; Ro. 14:10; I Co. 3:10-15; II Co. 5:10).

Idolatry is anything that is more important to us than God. Warren W. Wiersbe's, *Be Free*, as cited in Jones' *From Slavery to Sonship*, gives this definition of idolatry: "Idolatry is simply putting things ahead of God and people. We are to worship God, love people and use things, but too often we use people, love self, and worship things, leaving God out of the picture completely."⁸⁸

In putting their wives on the full-time payroll they have shown them favoritism, which is greed. The bible says to do "nothing out of favoritism" (I Tim. 5:21) and that favoritism is a sin (Jas. 2:9). Greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5).

Greed is a characteristic of false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1-3) and those who reject the Lord (Ps. 10:3; 2 Pet. 2:9-16; esp. v.14). Greed and covetousness are linked with idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Greed also indicates a depraved mind (Ro. 1:28-32).

The church has become an idol for many in the movement. Some of the teachings and beliefs that have led to this idolatry include "one true church," "the church is the kingdom of God," and the teaching of "total commitment" and the exclusivity that comes with it. One of Lifton's eight criteria for a thought-reform environment is called *Sacred Science*. Lifton defines this method, as cited by Giambalvo, as one where "the group's doctrine or

ideology is considered to be the ultimate truth, beyond all questioning or dispute.” The golden calf of idolatry is alive and well in the ICOC.⁸⁹

Being unloving is an identifying mark in their lives too. Your love for Jesus is seen by your obedience to God’s word (Lk. 6:46; Jn. 14:23-24; I Jn. 2:3-4, 5:3; II Jn. 1:6). These leaders were so preoccupied with themselves, their agenda, and getting all their “needs” met that there was little left to obey God’s commandment to love Him and others. This is the exact opposite of His teachings. This is not servant leadership.

These leaders have “secretly introduced destructive (abusive) heresies” (II Pet. 2:1) and to this day have institutionalized their abuse as being permissible, acceptable, and even encourage others to teach the same thing in *First Principles*. They are teaching that works must be added to the gospel. They are using the same behavior modification tactics and discipling methodologies that were first introduced back in the Boston days, but to a lesser degree in some areas.

In verse one, “...even denying the sovereign Lord” it should be noted that the false teachers Peter was warning about were possibly the kind who were not believers, whereas the heretics (the Judaizers) at least professed knowing the Lord.

Because the members of the ICOC have accepted this human-effort gospel, their focus would now be on the flesh. A flesh-bound religion breeds fleshly sins. Some of the leader’s sins were spread to the members: idolatry of the church and the “system” of doing things; cowardice in not confronting others; the pride of being a legalist and not relying on God. The members are both victims and abusers at the same time. In fact, there is a little bit of the Pharisee in all of us.

In a system of condemnation and despair, such as the ICOC, the well-intentioned efforts of those really trying to please God tend to result in anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, confusion, always questioning oneself, insecurity, frustration, arrogance, works-orientation, performance orientation, judging others, gossip, cowardice, hopelessness, and apathy. They have become emotionally dependant upon the leaders and the man-made system.

Another distinguishing mark of the movement is that members fail to mature. Like their leaders, they don’t rely on the bible alone for guidance but collectively seek help, guidance, and comfort from each other, their philosophies and traditions. This phenomenon can reflect a kind of “group-think” and is a poor substitute for being led by the Spirit. They are unaware they have been manipulated by a thought-reform system and don’t see their need to change. For the most part, they still believe they are the only saved Christians out there and no one else is “totally committed.” They continue to be fooled into thinking that anything negative about their group is “spiritual pornography” or persecution.

Life Controlled by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18)

A life controlled by the Spirit is in direct opposition to a life with a focus on the flesh.

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. **They are in conflict with each other**, so that you do not do what you want. **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law** (Gal. 5:16-18).*

Every Christian is responsible for choosing what course to follow: the flesh (man's way) or the Spirit (God's way). There is only one effective way to run that race (I Co. 9:24-27).

In verse 18, Paul explains that being led by the Spirit does not require the outward restraint of the law. Lasting transformation comes only from God and cannot be brought about by any law-keeping system.

In this next passage, the wonderful blessings of being lead by the Spirit are made known to us:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23).

Jones and his comments on this passage hold meaning:

The acts of the sinful nature are contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit even by the categories-acts and fruit. Acts, we commit or perform. Fruit is produced by the Spirit, not by our actions and performance. The fruit of the Spirit will grow and be produced in the lives of Christians when we willingly yield to the Spirit all the works of the flesh. This fruit cannot be genuinely perfected by our human nature.⁹⁰

The ICOC has tried in vain to “make” fruit, to “make” disciples, and to herd people around like cattle without ever having the kind of fruit Paul is talking about. There are few exceptions. The movement's goal was to produce behavioral change within its congregations as witnessed by their philosophy, tradition, methodology, doctrine, and rules.

Being outwardly religious and cloaking themselves in all sorts of religious terminology and scripture twisting, the leaders of the movement have fooled most undiscerning members into thinking they have the fruits of the Spirit. Because both the members and leaders are being misled by their own hearts and ideas, they are probably not aware of this at a conscious level. In other words, those who are under the control of an enslaving system of man's design cannot see themselves clearly.

It is apparent that the leadership does not exhibit these qualities. How could they? It is absurd to think that the system of the ICOC can produce fruits of the Spirit through law-keeping.

The first fruit of *love* seems to be of great importance to Paul. The kind of love he is talking of is *agape* love. This kind of love is foreign to the leaders because it means unconditional love. The very nature of the kind of legalism the leaders ascribe to makes a point of putting conditions on just about everything. Anyone who has ever had the courage to point out sin in the leader's life knows that the moment you do, they stop loving you. They claim they want you to be a Berean and study the bible to hold them accountable, but the minute you point to the skeletons in their closet you are no longer of interest to them.

With the kind of love that God provides we have an inner joy that rises above adversity and trials (Jas. 1:1-2). Many have been fooled, including myself, because they see the leaders and they appear to be joyful. I don't think they are, as witnessed by Paul when he asked the Galatians, "what has happened to all your joy?" (Gal. 4:15a). Due to all the restraints of legalistic Judaism they had lost their joy. The legalist puts the job of being outwardly joyful on himself and does not rely on God. He becomes an actor.

The fakeness and forced smiles that so many talk about after visiting an ICOC service speak volumes here. One of the movement's long-time women leaders, Sue Condon, wrote a compelling story about her experiences as a leader in the Boston Movement. She spoke about the staging and behind-the-scenes effort to make everything look perfect to the public. In her 1990 letter, "*A Diary*": *Why I left the Boston Movement*, Condon states:

There is a lot of manipulation going on behind the scenes to make the Movement look like the "perfect church" with the most "awesome" leaders, and people are fooled by it.⁹¹

Condon said that in 1988, she was told by the top brass that the only thing preventing her from being appointed a women's counselor was that McKean didn't think she smiled enough during the meetings. In other words, she wasn't fake enough.

The bible says that joy is a fruit; it is a natural outgrowth of our union with Christ. It can't be forced upon others through guilt or peer pressure. As a longtime member, I saw the same kind of obsessive attention to "looking good" at Sunday services. We were reminded regularly, as leaders, to be "out of ourselves," outgoing and assertive. If we were really joyful, there would be no need to be reminded to act joyful.

Life in Christ should be a joy and not a burden. The Jewish false teachers wanted to make slaves of Paul's converts (Gal. 2:4; 4:9; 4:31). A life that is filled with the Spirit of God will show the fruit of joy (Gal. 5:22).

The world's peace is temporal and lasts only as long as everything is going smoothly (Jn. 14:27; 16:33; Ro. 3:16-17). One of the highest dimensions of peace is a state of rest but there is no rest in a performance-driven system such as this.

The results of an emphasis on the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are obvious. There is a stark contrast between the life led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 18, 25) with the life led by the flesh (5:13, 19). Choosing a life oriented in fleshly achievements results in destruction. Choosing a life that relies on the Spirit for change results in eternal life.

It is each person's responsibility to invest (sow) either in the flesh or the Spirit; there are no other options. In doing so we must live and accept the blessings and consequences of our decisions.

Here is something for current members of the ICOC to consider. Are you sowing in the wrong field (Gal. 4:17)? Remember, the Judaizers wanted the Galatians to be zealous for *them*, not Christ. This suggests the possibility that the false teachers were also being paid by the Galatian believers.

The bible says this it is our responsibility to be good stewards with our time, energy, commitment, and money. Paul warned the Galatians not to be "deceived... a man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7).

Section IV: Issues Facing False Teachers and Their Followers

In spite of the rather extensive number of people involved in destructive cults and abusive groups, the Church in general has been poorly prepared to deal with this very serious issue.

Ronald Enroth is a celebrated evangelical expert on cults and professor of sociology at Westmount College, Santa Barbara, California. In his book, *Churches That Abuse*, he has given much needed documentation to the Church's inability to hear and respond to the cult problem.⁹²

In an article published in the Wellspring Journal in 1999, *Toxic Faith or Thought Reform?* Paul Martin, PhD says that there are no hard figures on the actual amount of people recovering from abusive church experiences but recent estimates by cult experts suggest there could be as many as 10,000 cultic groups in America today, and some 5,000,000 to 10,000,000 current members of destructive cults.⁹³

Symptoms of Abuse

According to Wellspring Retreat COO and client advocate Liz Shaw, about 12% of this year's total enrollment can be attributed to former members of the International Churches of Christ/ICOC. Shaw stated these victims of abuse as coming from all over the United States and not just one or two of the movement's churches.⁹⁴

Wellspring is a residential counseling center where persons exiting from abusive groups and cults can get intensive rehabilitation and counseling in order to help them cope with their experiences. Wellspring clients come for an intensive two-week treatment program. They have been ministering to cult survivors for nineteen years.

When asked if she considered the ICOC to be a cult, Shaw alluded to Lifton's eight criteria of thought-reform and said, "The ICOC's ex-members show all the hallmark symptoms of an abusive group, therefore if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck...it's a duck."⁹⁴

Some of the psychological symptoms of those exposed to thought-reform, according to Martin, are:

- (1) Denial of condition, (2) Depression, (3) Suicidal tendencies, (4) Alcohol/drug abuse may occur, (5) Overweight, in some cases, (6) Anorexia/bulimia, in some cases, (7) Other forms of despair (e.g. disillusionment), (8) Don't know what's wrong with them, just know they are miserable, (9) Induced dependency, (10) Misc. symptoms: inability to concentrate, to hold a job, to make decisions, loss of humor, etc., (11) No outward symptoms: nothing seems to be wrong, no depression or anxiety-i.e., denial of feelings, (12) Dissociation, "floating," and (13) Triggering stimuli: exaggerated reactions, etc.⁹⁵

Having spent fourteen years in the ICOC prior to leaving in 2003, I have a unique perspective on these symptoms. I have personally corresponded with over one hundred former members from all over the United States and overseas, and can attest that many of them have admitted experiencing these indicators. I, myself, have exhibited nine of the thirteen symptoms at one time or another.

“Victim blaming”

Perhaps the greatest injury brought on by the leadership within the ICOC has been the loss of faith for so many. The hypocrisy of the movement’s leaders, their false teaching, and control tactics, has so deeply damaged the hearts and minds of others that they have become hopeless and full of despair. Their faith has been “shipwrecked.” Many have a deep and profound sense of loss and have a very difficult time trusting other church leaders or any other adult again.

It took only a short time, perhaps even weeks, for Peter’s hypocrisy to lead Barnabas astray (Gal. 2:13). Think of the eternal damage done to some 300,000 former members of the ICOC who have undergone long-term exposure to serious hypocrisy from the leaders of the movement. Some of these men have been teaching error for twenty years or more!

To make matters worse, the tendency to blame victims has strongly influenced the direction taken by the movement. In their 2003 *L.A. Apology Letter*, a subtle form of this kind of blaming can be seen through the use of terms like, “feel,” “felt,” and the statement, “some felt controlled and manipulated.” When someone apologizes for serious wrongdoing and uses such language, common sense tells you they’re not letting themselves get in touch with what they actually did. It’s too nebulous and not concrete enough. In a sense, they are saying the members are too emotional and need to get their misleading feelings under control. They are projecting their own sins upon the members.

Not only was the letter a half-apology, it didn’t identify the source of the ICOC’s abuse—false teaching and a deceptive philosophy. I have tried to do that in this analysis.

Besides “victim blaming,” the issue of sympathy versus empathy should be mentioned here. Sympathy is when we try to consider and understand another person’s situation. It is purely intellectual and mental in nature. This is the kind of attention most therapists give their clients during private sessions. Most people can relate to hearing the words “I’m sorry you feel that way,” or “that must have felt awful” at some time in their life.

Conversely, empathy goes beyond the “thinking level”; it involves compassion and feeling what others feel. It involves taking on the hurt, pain, and loss of those suffering harm at the deepest and most profound level. I don’t see this kind of reaction in the *LA Apology Letter* or any other communication coming from any leader or church in the movement. Their language shows a denial of the problem.

Despite their efforts, this reminds me of the kind of technical righteousness of the Pharisees.

Recovery from Cults and Abusive Groups

In her critique, *What Are the Recovery Issues Following a Cultic Experience?* Carol Giambalvo lists recovery concerns of cult members as:

(1) Identity crisis, (2) Feeling disconnected, (3) Grief, (4) Boundary issues, (5) Trust issues, (6) Magical Thinking of cultic group, (7) Varying symptoms of post-traumatic stress, (8) Difficulty with relationships and authority figures, and (9) Underemployment.⁹⁶

Leaders Gradually Become Abusive

Some have wondered how a church like the ICOC could have become so heavy-handed and abusive. The answer to that question was given by Enroth's *Churches That Abuse*:

Gradually, as the pastors became aware of the influence they could exert and the power they could wield, they and their ministries began to change. Consciously or unconsciously, they took advantage of vulnerable people, and convinced them that God had given them, the shepherds, the right to exercise authority over the flock.⁹⁷

When “abusive religion substitutes human power for true freedom in Christ,” according to Enroth, this is the most easily recognized sign that abuse has reached an advance stage.

Along the same lines, Enroth cites John White and Ken Blue, *Healing the Wounded: The Costly Love of Church Discipline*, as saying:

People who abuse power are changed progressively as they do so. In abusing power they give themselves over to evil, untruth, self-blindness, and hardness without allowing themselves or anyone else to see what is happening. The longer the process continues, the harder repentance becomes. Church bosses must be spotted and rescued early, or they may never be rescued at all. They have caused inconceivable havoc among churches throughout history.⁹⁸

I believe this hardness of heart and the progressive erosion of leadership's conscience is what Paul meant by a “depraved mind” (Ro. 1:28).

An Appeal to the Abilene Christian University Lecturnship Group

Get the facts at any price! It is worth it to know what's happening! (Pr. 23:23, TLB)

In light of what has been said in this essay, why are the Churches of Christ having various unity conferences with this heretical group? We don't know all the reasons for such meetings but the damaged lives of at least a quarter-million former members testify to the seriousness of this group's methodology and false teachings.

Did Paul meet with the Judaizers in Galatia or did he simply warn the Christians there about their heretical teachings?

Has it occurred to those within the Churches of Christ that representatives within the ICOC might be hiding their sin? Could it be that they might be trying to make others *think* they are living God's way when the *facts* tell otherwise? Given the movement's long history of abuse, maturity and wisdom demand a closer look (Pr. 6:12-19; Mk. 7:22; II Ti. 3:13; Js. 3:17; I Pe. 2:1-3).

In the past, the ICOC leadership has been successful at making outsiders think they are living God's way. It must not happen during these meetings, but I'm afraid it's already too late. Some have pointed to the demeanor of movement spokesmen during last year's meeting at Abilene as sincere, authentic, capable, and passionate.

It is very common for false teachers to seek legitimacy with outsiders, especially those who might be sympathetic and endorse their views (Acts 15:24; Gal. 2:12). I believe it would be prudent to pause these historic meetings in favor of all parties learning what the most important issues really are.

Furthermore, one of the unintended outcomes of such meetings is the message it sends—abusers get more attention and understanding than the abused. It also sends a message to the abused by confirming their suspicions that religious leaders don't care about them.

Jesus said, "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come" (Lk. 17:1). Jesus also said, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing..." (Mt. 7:15a). Jesus told us ahead of time that false teachers, on the surface, would appear like fruitful and sincere Christians. Let's not forget that "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (II Co. 2:14).

One of the compliments given the church in Ephesus, in Revelations 2: 6, was their hatred of "the practices of the Nicolaitans." The Nicolaitans were a heretical sect within the church, just like the Boston Movement/ICOC of today. The question must be asked of those hosting future meetings with this group, "do you hate their practices?" Do you understand what their teachings are? Have you read the primary source data and printed material available in *What Does the Boston Movement Teach?* by Jerry Jones? These

original documents speak for themselves in some cases. Other times, it takes being familiar with the movement's private agenda to read between the lines.

Gentlemen, how can you fix the problem with the ICOC without understanding it? If fixing the problem is not your intention, ethics demand you at least expose and oppose the teachings and abuse of the leadership. It's hard to take these meeting very seriously at this time unless some serious "testing" (Rev. 2:2) of the ICOC gets under way.

External measurements can be very misleading and appearances can fool our minds and hearts. Jesus warns us not to judge by mere appearances (John 7:24). However, unless one is fully engaged and very familiar with the current goings-on in the ICOC and its past, an assessment of how they have changed is impossible and ill-advised. You can't make a right judgment about that unless you do your homework.

In my opinion, the Abilene group has been too hasty in their complimentary statements toward the ICOC, both in the *Christian Chronicle* and during last year's lecturnship. The bible says that our natural wisdom is inadequate to direct our steps as shown by (Ps. 94:11; Pr. 14:12; and Jer. 10:23).

In light of Proverbs 11:14 and 15:22, there will be little chance of shedding light on the problems with the movement without the counsel of long-time former members, like Jerry Jones, Ed Powers, Kyle Deggs and Rick Bauer. I can't imagine false teachers, like those of the ICOC, telling the truth about all the abuse that went on during their watch—can you? One of the consequences of life-dominating sin is that it deceives the one involved.

Nobody would expect to see false teachers with horns atop their heads, a pitchfork in one hand and a fistful of dollars in the other, but the manner in which the Abilene group is handling these meetings is just as unbelievable.

If the intent of these meetings is to understand the problem with the movement, it would be foolish to try and do so without the help of former members. I have based this viewpoint on (Pr. 18:13, 17; II Ti. 3:16-17; Js. 1:19). I also believe that in order for truthful answers to be given with a full understanding of the scope of the problem, there will be a need to seek help from the abused and not just the abusers. When these biblical standards are met, the Churches of Christ, together with the colleges and universities, should speak in a way that pleases the Lord, based on Eph. 4:15, 25.

To all the beloved brethren in the Churches of Christ, my wish and hope is that together we will speak with one voice against the false teaching of "works salvation" within the International Churches of Christ. The true Church should have in it a soldier's discipline with the content of that solidarity being an unshakable "faith in Christ" (Col. 2:5). Let us not break ranks by thinking we can rely on our own understanding and "fix" the problems with the ICOC.

Finally, Paul's exhortation to the Colossians is a safe haven for all of us in dealing with false teachers.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness (Col. 2:6-7).

Let us stop judging by mere appearances. May the Spirit lead and guide you into all truth,

In Him,

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Recovery for False Teachers Unlikely

Against all odds, many members have tried restoration discipline on the leadership of the organization based on Matthew 18:15-17. It should come as no surprise that the leaders did not heed the warnings and the "reformers" were left with no other choice but to leave the group. Enroth speaks of such crookedness by saying:

But what about rescuing the leaders and salvaging the followers? That is a major challenge facing the conventional evangelical church. Most of the abusive churches I have studied are independent, autonomous groups. They are not a part of a denomination or network that could provide checks and balances or any kind of accountability. As we have seen over and over again in these pages, their leaders are accountable to no one and resist any outside scrutiny. How can such independent groups *themselves* be disciplined or even investigated for aberrations? Because we value freedom of religion for all people and because we are reluctant to get involved in someone else's vineyard, even if we know it is "off the wall," the problem of abusive churches is likely to continue.⁹⁹

During a personal interview with Carol Giambalvo, an exit counselor for over twenty years, and cofounder of reFOCUS, a national support network for former cult members, she stated that with regards to the ICOC, a "full-blown recovery process" would need to be initiated. Speaking in more general terms, Giambalvo said that abusive leaders can sometimes come to see their theological errors but often make light of the equally as dangerous methodologies used to enforce them. Unwilling to embrace the social, psychological, and behavioral aspects of their thought-reform system and how it was used as the means to manipulate others, they often go back to it.

The recovery process, for obvious reasons, must be done in a Christian context outside of the movement's influence. The basic outline for overcoming any situation in life, even the sin of abusing Christians and being a false teacher, can be done through repentant deeds including one's thoughts, speech, and actions.

One of the requirements of acting biblically is that the person repenting must halt all activities and stop all associations that have to do with the particular sin that has enslaved them as shown by (Ro. 6:12-13, 21; I Co. 15:33; II Co. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 5:11-17; Phil. 3:16-20; I Th. 5:22; II Ti. 2:22).

For false teachers, that would mean removing any opportunity to abuse power. They must remove themselves from leadership. Since that won't happen without their true desire to repent, the likelihood of getting this done is not very likely. Outside help and accountability should be welcomed.

In terms of repentance, the need to think, speak, and act biblically, is a must. The current leadership has not even gotten to first base. That is why when current and former members talk about the "changes" being made, they often do not see the internal change that needs to be made. The key indicator that real change is going on in the ICOC will be when the leaders stop leading and get outside professional Christian counseling by those trained in cult-awareness, thought-reform, and scripture twisting. Another sign that real change is at hand is when the leaders outline their false gospel and false teaching in a way that is specific and void of excuses and the blaming of others.

The principle of removing all possibilities that might cause one to stumble and relapse into a life-dominating sin can be seen in the way alcoholics, drug addicts, gamblers, wife beaters, and rapists pursue specialized recovery. In all of these programs, the offender is not taken seriously if they are not willing to completely avoid the old haunts, familiar places, and friends that contributed to their sin in the first place. The same principle is true with regard to false teachers. False teachers of the ICOC must stop teaching and assume the role of an everyday church member.

In addition to everything else that's been said, here are some common-sense observations of current leadership behavior and their role in the false religion of the ICOC.

Issue 1: The leaders don't get it—*they* are the problem and so is *their teaching*.

They have been so focused on everyone else's problems and sins that they have yet to examine their own lives and ministries. Like the Pharisee, they set themselves up to appear righteous by dealing with externals, thus making real change an impossibility. They continue to try and solve their problems in a worldly manner. Baptizing more converts won't fix it; keeping quiet and being a coward won't fix it; apologizing and crying won't fix it; using word games, faulty logic, and philosophy won't fix it; blaming the members and fall-aways won't fix it. The real problem is the leaders themselves. It goes way beyond the surface of things and the irrelevant "changes" being made.

Issue 2: The leaders *chose* the behavior that put them in the role of being a false teacher.

They chose blind loyalty to a system over loyalty to Christ. They chose a life of imitating man over following the Holy Spirit and the Word. They chose to be people pleasers instead of God pleasers. They chose instant results regardless of who they hurt in the process. They alone are responsible for the consequences of those choices. If you are a false teacher, it's because *you* set it up that way. Hold yourself accountable, get a strategy, a plan, and change it. Get outside help because nobody else in the church will hold you accountable. There will be no applause, accolades, or fanfare. Be prepared to be shunned by your friends and those who do not understand.

Issue 3: Until the leaders figure out *why* they continue the self-destructive behavior of teaching “another gospel,” they will never stop teaching it.

Minimizing the real problems with the ICOC make it easier for leaders now, but staying willfully ignorant to these hidden payoffs will end in destruction. The leaders enjoy tangible rewards for their false teaching in the form of high salaries and perks. They also receive psychic gratification from those who depend on them for guidance. Exposing the mechanisms of thought-reform and the numerous false teachings within the group and its printed material would, or at least should, cause those incentives to end. Each staff member must figure out their motivations and payoffs to being a false teacher.

Issue 4: The problem of being a false teacher won't *go away* by keeping your “mental eyes” closed.

If you're unwilling to acknowledge the sin of perverting the gospel, you are killing your chances to fix the problem. It goes without saying that you cannot change what you do not acknowledge. Jesus taught this principle in Luke 5:31 when he said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” The leaders must recognize themselves as false teachers and abusers of God's flock before they can be spiritually healed. Although they didn't plan on being a false teacher, they allowed themselves to be vulnerable to the influence because they were in denial about their motivations for aspiring to leadership in the first place.

False Teachers have No Excuse

Since the bible was canonized nearly two thousand years ago, false teachers within the Christian churches have relied on misapplication, bad interpretation, and distortion to introduce their destructive teachings. In the case of the Judaizers, the scripture they were using to put their own brand of Christianity on others was correct, but the way they used it was not (misapplication). Let me say this again; this teaching was merely a distortion of the original intent of circumcision. It was not a bald-faced lie.

Many ICOC apologists have denied any false teaching in their organization by saying that the teaching was a misapplication. In defense of the *First Principles* study series, they say that there was nothing wrong with the scriptures in the study—just the ways they

were used. Sound familiar? That is precisely what the Judaizers were doing, using a valid passage in Genesis 17:12, and using it in a way that stamped Christ with their own Jewish trademark. They distorted Paul's teaching and were ultimately not submitting to the gospel of Christ.

In the case of the Judaizers, the Galatian believers probably thought they were simply adding a few Jewish customs to the gospel in order to enhance the value of their faith in Christ. But this addition to the gospel actually negated the essence of the gospel, especially the gospel of grace. Two thousand years later, things haven't changed.

In order for teachers of falsehood to be false teachers, they must do the following:

1. Their teaching must undermine the heart of the gospel; or the good news of Jesus, forgiveness, salvation or the grace of Christ (Galatians 1:6-10, 2:5, 14).
2. Their divisive opinions or teachings must be abusive and lead people away from God (2 Peter 2:1).

Some people think that false teachers are only those that deny "Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 2:22). Others may think that a false teacher has to be someone who changes the bible literally, like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. Still others think that Catholics, who forbade priests to marry, are guilty. (That would make most Christians feel somewhat comfortable in that these dreaded and evil persons are generally outside mainstream Christianity). Early church history and the apostles' writings on this very topic may cause you to rethink your views.

False teachers will be directly responsible for an end-time falling away of biblical proportions (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12), being one of the causes for the love of most to grow cold. Already warning signs are evident in the ICOC. Nearly 300,000 souls have tasted the deceptive teachings of the ICOC and have left the organization, with a great many shipwrecked in their faith. Paul foretold that traitors, ungodly men, and hypocrites, would, with a form of godliness, infiltrate the church with doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9).

The fact is that false teachers are going to be more numerous today than during the times of Jesus—much more numerous. In fact, the Lord himself, when speaking of the signs of the end of the age, declared that "many false prophets [teachers] will appear and deceive many people" (Matthew 24:11). They would come to the church in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). What a frightening picture given by our Lord! Paul, Peter, and John addressed two early forms of heresy, Gnosticism and the Judaizers, in the books of Colossians, in John's letters, in 1,2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter, and perhaps 1 Corinthians.

Fruitless Deeds of False Teachers (Eph. 5:11)

Since the topic of this study was to reveal the true identity of the movement's leaders within the context of false teaching, vigilant people must also realize the bad fruit of their doctrines and practices. Here is but a short list of the other false teachings and abuses perpetrated by these wolves as they twisted scriptures to gain control over their sheep. This 2003 list was provided by a group of brothers in Los Angeles, California, who used it in hopes their leaders would repent. This list was given to top leadership *after* the Henry Kriete letter came out and *after* the *LA Apology Letter* was written.

*Watch out for false prophets [teachers], they come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. **By their fruit you will recognize them** (Mt. 7:15-16a).*

Twisting Scripture (2nd Peter 3:14-18), Indianapolis Markings (Romans 16:17-18) (3rd John 9-10), Minimizing Bereans (Acts 17:10-11), Lack of leader's integrity (Proverbs 10:9), hollow and deceptive philosophies" (3rd John 9-10), Hierarchy where all the authority is on a few individuals (John 13:12-17) (Luke 20:5-47), Discipling (Acts 8: 26-40), Greed (1st Corinthians 5:11) (Luke 12:15), Slandering people who have left (3rd John 9-10), Unloving toward the weak (Luke 15: 1-7), Idolatry of man (Hosea 4:5-14), Self anointing (Jeremiah 23: 16-32), Leading the flock astray/ false shepherding (Ezekiel 34: 1-24), Covering the sins of the leadership (3rd John 9-10), God's Modern Day Movement=God's Modern Day Pharisees (Philippians 3:1-11), Withholding baptism (using sentimentality as a requirement to get baptized) (Acts 11: 15-17), Withholding restorations (beg for forgiveness) (1st Corinthians 3:6-7) (2nd Corinthians 2:5-11).

Lack of spiritual maturity in the church (Hosea 4:5-14), Judging other churches we don't even attend. (James 4:11-12), Grieving the Spirit (not using the gifts that God has given people in the congregation because their plans are not as sharp as the leaders plans) (Ephesians 4:30) (1st Thessalonians 5:19), Counting the cost (estimate the cost occurs in the NIV) is only in the KJV. Asking Christians to use the NIV but using terms from other translations where they fit the purpose of the church. (Proverbs 1:23), Radical repentance is expected from the membership but not the leaders. (Luke 12:41-48), Elders are never publicly rebuked like the Bible says to do. (1st Timothy 5: 17-20), Speaking for God when the Bible is silent. Shouldn't we be fervently searching the scriptures to find applicable circumstances that we can draw parallel lines to? (1st Corinthians 4:1-5), Fear of men instead of fearing The Lord (John 9: 20-23), and Glorifying the church instead of glorifying God. (Psalms 22:22-23).

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Section 2: Disciple's Baptism Becomes "Another Gospel"

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