

# Honest to God

## Revolution through repentance and freedom in Christ

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How the Lord has covered the Daughter of Zion  
with the cloud of his anger!  
He has hurled down the splendor of Israel  
from heaven to earth;  
he has not remembered his footstool  
in the day of his anger.

Without pity the Lord has swallowed up  
all the dwellings of Jacob;  
in his wrath he has torn down  
the strongholds of the Daughter of Judah.  
He has brought her kingdom and its princes  
down to the ground in dishonor.

Lam 2:1-2

An open letter to the elders, teachers, and evangelists in our fellowship of churches:

Dear brothers (and sisters)-my fellow servants in Christ:

Grace and peace.

God has been very good to us. He has demonstrated much love to all of us since the beginning of our 'movement.' Countless miracles, signs, and wonders have occurred before our eyes and the eyes of our sons and daughters. Many of who are now disciples. Untold blessings have been spread at our feet. Who could have imagined all that has been accomplished- the heroes, the sacrifice, the answered prayers, all the churches and countries! Truly, much grace and power has been lavished on all of us by God, as well as great patience.

However, at this moment in our brief history, I have never been more alarmed, even ashamed of what we have become. Or more grief-stricken for my own sins in helping to deepen our current problems.

### Crossroads and Crisis

Our movement is no longer moving. This is no mere "awkward- teenage phase" that we constantly hear about. Virtually every high-gate we have built, and every trophy that we have boasted in- as *proof to ourselves and to the world*- that we are 'Gods Modern Day Movement', has been effectively dismantled. The things we boasted in: our numerical growth, our retention rate, our member to fall away ratio, the faithfulness of our children,

our never missing a Special Contribution, our consistent sacrificial giving, and now, perhaps most painful of all- even our unity- all these have been leveled by the hand of God. On what grounds do we now claim that we are “God’s Modern Day Movement”? And on what basis, now, can we be sure? Is God even ‘with’ some of our churches and leaders anymore? Everything we trusted in has been taken away. The ‘remnant chosen by grace’ and the baby saved from ‘kicking in its own blood’ have grown up to become a very proud princess indeed! But now what? In the prophet’s words, our skirt has been lifted over our head, and our shame exposed. And so I ask again- are we- ‘THE ICOC’, ‘THE KINGDOM’, ‘THE ONE TRUE CHURCH’- still the remnant chosen by grace? Or was that claim itself simply too much for God? I know this is painful to hear, and you can be sure I am crying with you.

Brothers and sisters, as leaders in the kingdom, as servants of Christ- we have reason to pause and deliberate, deeply. We are at a crossroads, a crossroads that will soon become a crisis if we do not act courageously. Fallen elders and evangelists; countless other leaders who have resigned or stepped down- staff and non staff alike; questionable practices and teachings; serious concerns over finances; the heart-ache, disappointment and even disgust from the mouths of faithful but weary disciples who are now ‘allowed’ to talk openly (some in great anger); the quarter million who have fallen away; the tens of thousands who have walked away or been pushed away; and the enormous sub-culture of critics that constantly challenge us (and let’s be honest, several of them are sincere and conscientious)- all of these things and more- have damaged our integrity, deepened the mistrust between ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’, and given reason for many to question our moral authority and even legitimacy.

I am not denying the good and miraculous things God has done, or the faith and sincerity of the rank and file believer. Or even your love for God and zeal and personal sacrifice. But I am concerned about what we have become as a movement- a movement that is no longer moving- and *why this has happened*. That is my main question or thesis I suppose- not *what* has happened to us per se (albeit extensive and serious), but more deeply, **why** has it happened and, deeper still, why has it been allowed to happen?

### **The London/UK Upheaval**

As many of you know, in London we are in the midst of a spiritual upheaval. I would even call it a crisis or an unraveling. Please continue in your prayers for us. The London and UK churches have had an incredible history and as a movement we owe them much.

Unfortunately, over the years, because of harshness and legalism and systemic problems I will soon identify, the churches have suffered dearly. The Templers have now resigned because of oppressive leadership. To quote Mark’s own letter, ‘The church has not been bearing spiritual fruit, and many people have been hurt. The environment of accountability, pressure and negativity was not inspiring, and Christ was not lifted up. Many souls have been saved. But many have been lost.’

And the response from Adrian Hill, ‘It has at this stage become apparent that Mark and Nadine Templer do not enjoy the confidence of the full time ministry staff. Due to an authoritarian style of leadership, and the harsh administration of accountability, an environment was created which was oppressive. We commend the Templers for taking responsibility for what has taken place.’

However, and this is vital, the problems in London as expressed in the current crisis, and the depth of feelings now being openly shared are hardly just about the Templers

leadership, but are historic to the 20 year life of the congregation-especially the last fifteen or so.

### **God Says 'Enough'**

A backlash from years of 'not listening', insensitivity, abuse, coercion and legalism -as well as cowardice from the full-time ministry leaders to stand up for the truth- is now under way. We are in the midst of excruciating openness and pain right now. The credibility of much of the ministry staff is now being questioned. We are having open forums - and years of suffering, questions and concerns are pouring out. Some of it is hostile; some of it, unspeakably sad; and to be sure, some of it unfair. However, every last word is useful.

In short, what has been sown is now being reaped, and those practices and sins that are systemic to our movement are being exposed by God. It is that simple. This dramatic turn of events, how they unfolded, their speed and intensity could not have been orchestrated by a man- it is just too painful and unnerving to be of human origin. The presence of God seems overwhelming at times-his dread, as well as his grace. And even though most of the outpouring has settled quite a bit, some of the biting and devouring continues. Hearts are still breaking, and hearts are being crushed. Even among the full time staff, anger and hurt and mistrust have taken hold. (But is being dealt with decisively and graciously). The church has demanded several resignations, and several have been tendered. In fact, the majority of full time ministry staff have offered to resign pending future 'commendation'. Some have stepped down permanently already.

In spite of all this, the Christians are feeling liberated, emancipated even. And in spite of the hurt and anguish, they generally believe that God is faithful to His promises, that He has come to rescue His people and provide them with shepherds who fear Him, and who will love His flock above themselves, and who will no longer lord it over them. In my view, in answer to the cries of many, God is answering with thunder. In short: He has had enough. His sheep are being saved. His 'leaders' must now give account.

### **Epicenter Of A Revolution**

It is not necessary to go into the specifics of the issues that are being raised in London. Let me just say that what has been vocalized by the Christians here, by and large, are similar to the concerns many of our critics and 'fall aways' have voiced over the years- some with equal intensity. What is so painful is that these sentiments are coming from the faithful, the persevering, the good and noble hearted, and even from best friends we are 'over in the Lord.' These are things that have been in their hearts for years. Only now, collectively, have they been emboldened to speak. And this should not have surprised any of us.

To my knowledge, this is the most significant event ever to happen in one of our churches. It is much more significant than what occurred in Indianapolis. In fact, there can be no comparison made to anything since our beginning. I also believe that this is going to make an impact all over the world. London is the epicenter of a 'new movement' of God that I am convinced will make huge waves around the world. For this very reason I am writing about it. An incredible door of opportunity has been opened for us by God- a new passageway for repentance and rediscovering our freedoms in Christ. But I also believe that God is commanding us to enter, not just asking us to, or we will forfeit His grace and pleasure.

Of course this is intensely personal, but in reality, it is not specific men who are under attack per se, but our 'religious culture'. In London, the upheaval is against systemic evils that have gone unchallenged for too long. Resistance, if not rebellion, is *always* the fruit of conformity and coercion, and rightly so- 'You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men'. And 'Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery' As JFK once said, 'If you make peaceful revolution impossible, you make violent revolution inevitable.' Please pray for a peaceful revolution.

## **How It Started**

Mark and Nadine are true heroes in the kingdom, and rightly so. They have served and sacrificed for the gospel well beyond what most of us would dare to. I have no doubt that Mark and Nadine would suffer martyrdom for Christ, they love Him so. In spite of their mistakes and sins, few would question whether they have lived and lead from a clear conscience. Nevertheless, they have sinned and have fallen hard- if only temporarily. We believe they are repentant/repenting and that their decision to resign is crucial to bring much needed healing to London. Mark is a very dear and longtime friend, and what is so excruciating for me personally is having to see another good man fall hard to 'the sins of our system'.

After the so-called LA Unity meeting, Mark opened himself up to *honest* feedback from the full-time staff and faced a one-way barrage of hurt and questions and concerns, sometimes in anger. It then carried on in private for several more weeks. It was devastating for them, and hard on all. In my view, it was one of the most courageous decisions I have ever seen a man make, but was the right thing to do.

Mark has taken responsibility for his sins. Now the rest of the staff, who have also suffered from abuses of authority, are having to own up to their own misguided pressures and practices over the years, the whole process falling like dominoes all around the UK. Whether from commission, omission, cowardice, bad theology or irresponsibility -our sins needed to be exposed and acknowledged for repentance and healing to take place, and for the crucial restoration of trust.

Why am I telling you this? Specifically, why tell you about the sins and shortcomings of one man in particular, Mark? Because Mark has become one of hundreds of leaders, if not thousands, including myself, who have been or are currently trapped in the same kind of sins. And the same systemic evils that entangled him, have also entangled multiplied thousands of us as well. That is the stubborn reality and nature of our hierarchy. As you will see, many of the issues I am going to raise in this paper are endemic to our 'culture' as a movement - the corruption of power, selfish ambition, the continuing climate of fear and cowardice, the bravado and rank duplicity from our 'top leaders'. Why I am so ashamed and saddened is that I have been as much to blame as any one. But really, whether more or less is beside the point, because almost all of us are guilty to some extent.

## **Salvation Issues**

My criticisms and concerns are not merely about one's personal style of leadership, and cannot be dismissed as the actions of a few rogue leaders or overly zealous, but immature evangelists. These are the sins and weaknesses we all share- movement wide. They are not small gripes and criticisms about our methods or even a few glaring shortcomings. In fact, I have come to believe that these are *salvation issues*- yours and mine- and as a natural

consequence, the salvation issues of many of our hearers as well. I am saddened to say this, and I choose my words carefully - but the integrity of 'our gospel' is at now at stake- the gospel of Gods grace- as well as the future relevance and power of our churches. And just as in London, unless there is a 'kingdom-wide' admission of guilt and repentance where necessary, a clear denunciation, and perhaps hardest of all, a sincere public apology, I believe we may become heretical in just a few more years.

## The Pharisees

The sins of the Pharisees were endemic to their religious culture. What I mean is, once 'in the group', there was no way to be immune from its evils. They simply could not escape from 'within' the system. Even if somehow they could objectively see through it all, they could not remain a Pharisee and exclude themselves from its corruption. The demonic values and pervasive influences of their party would touch every last Pharisee to some extent. Their pride and arrogance; their exclusivity; their elitism; their outward vanity and bravura; their titles of respect and authority and personal renown; their heavy burdens that crushed so many, their devouring of widow's houses to maintain *their system*; and their 'sneering greed'- albeit hidden - were something that a Pharisee *could not be immune from* if he remained 'one of them'

The Pharisees, or 'the separate ones', had misguided but noble intentions to begin with. They wanted to protect the law from law-breakers and so *imposed* a religious system of rules and regulations and traditions to be a 'hedge' around the law of God. They reasoned: 'If they don't break our rules, then they will not be able to break the Law of Moses'. We all know this. And we all know the sorry outcome- freedom denied, individual integrity diminished, the Sabbath becomes a tyranny, the weightier matters of the law-justice, love and mercy are neglected, and ultimately, the eventual slavery of men to **the powers that be**.

Once their religious system was firmly established, it then only needed to be stabilized and maintained. Overtime, naturally, the Pharisees as an institution became *systemically evil*. Therefore, what they came to represent 'as a whole'- what they evolved into- needed to be exposed and vigorously denounced by Christ. What an offence that must have been! In fact, has the world ever witnessed such a sustained and unsparing attack on religious leaders? I don't think so.

Certainly, there must have been sincere Pharisees - Paul for one. And a few more we can assume from reading the gospels. But together-as a system of religious authority- they were 'sons of hell', 'fools', 'blind guides', 'whitewashed tombs', 'a brood of vipers', and finally, a barrier to the truth of God's goodness and grace: 'You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces'.

They were lawyers and teachers of the law; sharp and prominent and well respected (at least to their face). They sat 'in Moses' seat' and so needed to be 'obeyed'. They were men of extreme dedication and zeal- missionaries to distant countries and fanatically 'separated' from all *outward* sins. Nevertheless, in spite of their sincerity and zeal for God- every convert to the Pharisees in the words of Jesus, became 'twice as much a son of hell' as the one who converted them. That is how powerful a religious system can be. It will ignore the voice of conscience, the voice of reason and even the voice God.

In light of this, should we as leaders not pause to reflect on our own leadership values and doctrines? Should we not humble ourselves, and even tremble before God when we realize how extensive this battle between Christ and the religious leaders of his day became? Why such rigorous denunciations and warnings? Why so many *written* heated exchanges in the gospels? Why would Jesus - who was meek and lowly - publicly berate them and insult them and constantly expose their hypocrisies to public shame? My answer is this -they were to be an example and warning to you and me, the religious leaders of our own generation. This demonic tendency towards pride and control, ostracization and greed, no matter what name it goes by or in what century, will keep on waging war until it has once again infiltrated and ruined the integrity of God's leaders. And through us, into the church.

## **Apostasy**

Apostasy is a word we all know and fear. We have warned each other repeatedly over the years, 'we are only one generation away from apostasy' This is a true statement. In just a few years, all of the Galatian churches, an entire geographical region, were about to fall from grace. That is why, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul is so urgent and even angry in his defense of the gospel and personal liberty in Christ. His apostolic authority, and therefore his gospel, were under attack. As a consequence, *their* salvation and the integrity of the 'true gospel' were at stake. The legalists who poisoned them were anathema.

Again, within just a few decades, five of seven churches in Asia Minor had or were in the process of apostatizing. (Revelation 2-3) How quickly a religious movement can be corrupted! Even within the lifetime of eyewitnesses to the resurrection, even with living apostles at the helm!

For the most part, we as a 'movement' have succumbed to several evils that are systemic- and are bitterly difficult to admit, let alone see our way out of. We need ruthless and courageous honesty, as well as brokenness before God and His Word if we are to regain what has been lost or surrendered or corrupted. I believe that many of our sins and practices will continue on forever unless we attack our *entire* religious culture head on. Or until God strikes the shepherds and scatters the sheep for good. We must, without sentiment, identify what is systemically evil, and what is bad theology, then publicly denounce them- to our churches and to the world if necessary.

## **'Our System'**

By and large, as a movement, and by that I mean the sum total of our global congregations, we have slipped into serious error, if not apostasy. The devil has his fangs deep in our neck, and I am afraid that unless we repent -many of our churches and thousands more of our Christians will be devoured.

Although there are a few exceptions, and only a few, we also have become another religious 'system'. At least that is a word I hear more and more each year, perhaps one hundred times this month alone- a word that frightens me and nauseates me at the same time. Again, the devil has been lying to us, and for whatever the reasons, we have not fought back tooth and nail. We have become proud and blind, just like the Pharisees. And

being blind without knowing it is the most frightening kind of blindness of all. This paper is an attempt to open our eyes before it is too late. My goal is not only to break our heart, but in a sense, to slap us in the face as well.

I, for one, refuse to belong to a system; any system that is not clearly of divine origin. I was baptized into a kingdom and into union with the God/Man, Jesus Christ, but not into a system. That is all I have ever wanted. That is all that I need.

### **Failure Is Not An Option**

In my opinion, London, as one of our first plantings, with so many seasoned evangelists who have come and gone, and with so much kingdom-wide exposure and influences (good and bad), is a microcosm of our movement-for better or for worse. That's why this process must succeed, but why I am so afraid it might fail.

In London, it will not be enough to simply change the long-term leadership structures, or merely acknowledge and apologize for specific sins and abuses, however sincere. The Christians deserve so much more, and rightfully, are demanding so much more. In general, they are fed up, disgusted and angry because of the sins and widespread abuses of leadership and now have what you might even call, through the Spirit, a 'forehead of flint'. There is simply no going back.

What is essential to our success is this: not only must the sins and abuses be radically repented of (and there are many), but also, more importantly, the structural evils that helped foster them must be theologically exposed and **denounced**. I am afraid that without this vital step, there will be no profound or permanent change; let alone true forgiveness and healing. This is a very painful time for us in London, but not as painful as the outcome if the process is minimized, rushed through, covered over or spun.

That said, I don't believe it needs to take long to recover, if we are thorough. It will be 'scary' of course, but we must assume God is accomplishing a deeply gracious and purifying work. Jesus stated, 'I know your deeds' to the seven churches of Asia Minor, and then, just as simply, 'Repent'.

In a nutshell, London is all of us. Our entire religious movement- our culture and belief system, our spiritual abuses, the way we train our Christians, and our control mechanisms are so widespread and invasive, that unless they are officially, uniformly and publicly denounced, they will continue on forever. Sweeping evils and bad theology can only be rectified by **exposing** and **opposing**. That should be the urgent agenda for the next 'LA meeting', and maybe five months from now is not urgent enough. Movement wide, we have no choice but to admit and apologize, expose and expunge, denounce and dismantle.

### **Apology and a Few Definitions**

#### *Apology*

'Let God be true and every man a liar'

Before I continue, let me say, I am not resigning or even remotely interested in leaving our churches. I am deeply in love with our fellowship of churches, and am grateful to God for all he has done for us and through us. But you must understand, for me, this is much more than a lovers quarrel. I was called to be an evangelist and so it must be. I am called to

proclaim and defend the whole counsel of God-no matter the consequences. And so I have chosen to fight back, hard.

- I am more ready than ever to discuss, debate, renounce and dismantle. That said, I am also prepared to disown if I have to, be disowned if it comes to that.
- The reason I am writing this paper is simple – no one else has. Or if they have, nothing of substance has come of it. I started writing this 18 months ago but let it sit because I was intimidated. However, because of recent resignations, (and in my opinion) the ‘failed’ LA unity meeting, and the spiritual crisis now unfolding in London, the timing could not be more appropriate. I have been strengthened in my resolve.
- I am asking each of you to weigh my words carefully. If I am wrong there is nothing to fear. If you disagree, then you must defend.
- I realize that many of you have good and noble hearts and that you have spoken up and tried to resist what is wrong. Several of you really are champions of grace and freedom. However, to one degree or another, all of us have been caught in the cross- fire. That is the nature of systemic evil. And only a full on assault by all of us will prevail.
- My comments are based on the uniform and universal experience of thousands of Christians, hundreds of private conversations, ‘late night’ conversations, and the public statements and sentiments expressed by full time staff and non-staff alike.
- My words cannot not be easily dismissed. We first visited Boston in 1981, and moved there in the spring of 1982. The third couple to do so, I think. I have been disciplined by all these men: Bob Gempel, Kip McKean, Al Baird, Jim Blough, Mike Taliaferro , Mike Fontenot and others. Douglas Arthur has been a major influence in my life for more than thirteen years, and Douglas Jacoby as well. Before moving to London (our second time), we served in the American Commonwealth Region under DA from 1994 till 2001. In various capacities, Marilyn and I have lived and served on four continents, in six countries, two world sectors, ten churches and about 15 different ministries. I say this for one reason: we have seen enough, experienced enough, heard enough and done enough in the last twenty years to believe, with great agony but deep conviction, that we are entangled in several systemic evils. Evils that are all encompassing, affecting our entire fellowship of churches.
- I am sorry about the length, but felt it was essential to prove my thesis. I have tried to make it as organized and readable as possible. Although rarely referenced in full, most of the Scriptures I am sure you can identify. A few I have quoted in full.
- The intensity and number of examples is not intended to overwhelm, although I am sure they will, but to prove more convincingly my foundational arguments.
- Of course this is extremely personal, to all of us. But I have endeavored not to use ‘personal examples’ as such so you can focus on the issues, and not the men.

### *Working Definitions*

‘Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.’

1. Liberty: Gk. eleutharia; freedom, generosity, independence. A distinctive blessing of the economy of grace, in contrast to the Old Testament's legal restrictions and rules about life. Opposite: deouleria; slavery or the state of dependence or having to follow a prescribed course.
2. Systemic: 'Of, pertaining to, or affecting the whole body'
3. Endemic: 'Widespread, peculiar to a particular area or people'. As in, diseases that are endemic to the tropics.
4. Apostasy: 'Abandonment of a former allegiance, as to one's faith'

### **Four Systemic Evils**

If movements begin in caves and die in cathedrals, here are the four main Pillars in *our* cathedral that must be denounced and demolished:

Our corrupted hierarchy  
 Our obsession with numbers  
 Our shameful arrogance (the cause/by -product of 1 and 2)  
 Our seduction by mammon

#### **1. Our corrupted hierarchy**

*Ah, sinful nation,  
 A people loaded with guilt,  
 A brood of evildoers,  
 Children given to corruption!  
 They have forsaken the Lord;  
 They have spurned the  
 Holy One of Israel  
 And turned their backs on Him*

*Why should you be beaten anymore?  
 Why do you persist in rebellion?  
 Your whole head is injured,  
 Your whole heart afflicted  
 From the sole of your foot to the top of your head  
 there is no soundness--  
 only wounds and welts  
 and open sores,  
 not cleansed or bandaged  
 or soothed with oil. **Isaiah 1:4-6***

By and large, intentional and unintentional, we have become a religious hierarchy that has created, fostered and sustained a culture of control and dependence on men, rather than freedom. As leaders in this hierarchy, we have become a band of conflict-avoiders, cowards and men-pleasers, rather than God-pleasers. This is the only way to explain not only what we do, but why we keep on doing it.

That we have become a top to bottom hierarchy is not in question. The truth is we are. Why we have chosen this model, and sought to crystallize it, when the apostolic church has no such model, is the big question. Even with other models to pattern ourselves after; even with so many teachers in our churches who surely know better, the fact is that we have chosen and systematically enforced *this one*. The reason I use the word ‘enforced’ is simple: we have become what we’ve wanted to become; what we have insisted on becoming.

How did this happen? I am not entirely sure. Why we let happen is the more radical question. We began with good intentions: to structure ourselves, to create a framework for our message and our mission, and to foster unity and cooperation. Over time, however, we’ve evolved into a culture that has not respected the dignity of human freedom, but instead has sought to control the lives of those under us and around us. Well-intentioned or not, we have failed to become a people pleasing to God. I believe that God is now opposing our cult of personality, and our abuse of spiritual authority in the strongest possible way.

What do I mean by a culture of control? Consider these facts: We are a hierarchy, and have been led by one man at the top. We have had a ‘founder’, complete with personal and ‘kingdom-wide’ authority that we were expected to respect and follow. We have had World Sector Leaders and Geographic Sector Leaders – to consolidate the grip of power and establish a global network of control over every last congregation. We teach ‘one church, one city’, not always in the pure interest of unity, but as a means of tightening control.

Local church autonomy is practically viewed as heresy. Intimidating statements have been made to keep us all in line. We’ve been told to ‘get our Boards on board’, undermining the very purpose of having a board in the first place. As ‘lead evangelists’, we have routinely forced our administrators to ‘get in line’ or be ‘loyal to us’ – as plans and programs and pet projects are railroaded through to the dismay of all. Administrators have admitted to deceit in the name of compliance, and to ‘smoke and mirrors’ with the finances. Some of the more intimidated, have been involved in wholesale financial mismanagement.

We have universally maligned our critics, and tried to protect our members from reading ‘spiritual pornography’. Other materials are also censored from widespread circulation-brilliant and Scripturally insightful papers from some of our own teachers among them. Papers that have gone against the party line.

We have routinely humiliated and marginalized those members who speak out as ‘critical’ and ‘disloyal.’ Many of our churches have autocratic leaders. We give perks to the compliant, and bigger pay checks to those higher up the chain of command. We reward outward conformity.

‘Official Kingdom’ issues include an enforced Special Contribution every year, the collecting of monthly statistics worldwide, and the recognition of KNN and UpCyberDown as our ‘official’ media sources. (Some of these issues are the same as those brought up by Ed Powers, resulting in his being dis-fellowshipped and marked by us. While not endorsing his approach or commenting on his integrity, I wonder how many other members and leaders have questioned these same practices and pronouncements?)

We have also exerted ‘influence’ or suppressed suspicions by the use of ‘spin’, non-transparency, and double standards. For example, we are very open about the sins of those underneath us, but not those ‘above’ us, because ‘it will hurt the church’.

We have given our evangelists an authority greater than our elders, when clearly, the elders have higher moral and spiritual requirements for leadership as ‘overseers of the flock’ Men

who are specifically commanded to guard that which was purchased by the blood of Christ. How can this be?

And just *why* do we have so few elders among us? I believe it is not always because of family or maturity issues, but because we have not found many men who are willing to commit completely to our party line, or who have not come up through the full-time ranks as it were. Their local churches would trust and commend them, but we do not. They have not proven if they will comply with 'the system', therefore *we cannot be sure*.

We have seen almost all criticism of the movement to be sinful. We accuse people of having bad hearts or bad attitudes or independent spirits, when very often, they have every right to feel as they do. When anyone does leave the church, they are automatically categorized as a 'fall away.' But why? Many have left because of conscience issues, or harsh treatment, or from feeling trapped and guilty by the way they've been led. Is it fair or right to declare that they have left God because they've decided to leave our ranks? Others choose to stay, but live in constant fear of being branded as divisive or disloyal if they disagree, and will routinely follow bad advice for the sake of submission. Others simply go numb, suffer in silence, sit at the back or just roll over and play dead.

### On Discipling

We have assumed, wrongly, that the sheep are stupid. We have trained them to depend on men, on us in fact, and not on Christ. 'Did you get advice' for the most part means 'Did you get permission.' Yes of course, they are vulnerable and open to attack, but they are not stupid. It is we who have been stupid, Biblically and spiritually. Should we not assume, rather, that a true, Spirit-filled Christian desires to please God, not to rebel? Ezekiel 36: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws'.

Through our discipleship partner theology, we have attempted, like modern-day Pharisees, to put a hedge around God's law. In trying to protect or control the Christians, we have routinely violated their liberty in Christ. We have not trusted disciples to live by their own convictions and decisions (and mistakes), and have fostered in them an unhealthy dependence, rather than freedom to grow and mature. Many of our discipling guidelines are nothing more than 'rules taught by men', condemned by Jesus as burdensome and legalistic. No control mechanisms, or traditions of men, or rules and culturally accepted regulations will keep anyone faithful who does not want to be faithful in their heart. But they *will* create rebellion and criticalness among sincere and liberated Christians. We did not become new creations to be controlled by men; rather, 'it is for freedom Christ has set us free'

### On Church Authority

In the N.T. there is not one mention of one congregation 'over' another, or of 'pillar churches'. In our misguided zeal to make certain churches the biggest and best, we have plundered the ranks of sister congregations. This man-made, humanly engineered 'growth' formula is just not Spirit led. It has resulted in bad feelings and cynicism, by those affected directly and those merely observing. (James 3)

Our lack of autonomy and freedom has blunted our thinking. There is very little 'thinking outside the box' in the 'ICOC' in terms of diversity in leadership structure, women's role in ministry, the collection of contribution, and even our teaching (e.g. the 'official studies') All of

this contributes to the control of our members and ministry staff, a putting out of the Spirit's fire.

### On Ministry Training And Practices

In the N.T., there is no control of one leader over another. We have no rulers or lords. That is what the pagans do, Jesus said. But 'with you it must not be so'. The Bible says all of us, from apostles to 'men of little account' are free in the Lord. But we dare not challenge *our* leaders!

Why not? In the N.T. leaders were criticized, abandoned, disagreed with, questioned, challenged, and made the object of bad (or good) report. They were put on the defense by their *own* ministries- and to a large extent, this was surprisingly tolerated (Revelation 2) Sure, most of the time an enemy may have stirred this up, but the Christians were not uniformly condemned for it. Why should they be? There were many false apostles and deceitful workmen among them, and they needed to be alert. Those leaders and apostles who were truly accredited by God appealed to their life and doctrine as their defense. That is all. No one enjoys dealing with a strong willed or contentious opponent, especially a brother in Christ, but forced compliance, out of fear of being shut down or shamed, is just as evil. We have not cultivated an environment where there is freedom to question, challenge or confront the 'leadership'. Shame on us.

For the most part, we have surrounded ourselves with loyal men – not those necessarily loyal to God or their own conscience, but loyal to us – very much like tribal kings. Those who make waves are not tolerated.

Another question: how can we be utterly honest and live with integrity when those above us, 'our best friend and discipler' is at the same time our 'boss'? If I, like Paul, may need to oppose my 'friend' to his face, or must strongly challenge a course of action that my 'boss' wants to take, it is not just my job that is at stake, but all of my relationships, friendships, future security, and the emotional well-being of my family and their relationships as well. All of these loyalties and conflicts of interest are twisted together in one huge knot – making it difficult to be honest and true to our own convictions. This is another aspect of control that contributes to conformity and ultimately, to apostasy and seared consciences.

The way we have moved leaders around at will and altered the leadership of many churches is also questionable. So many leaders have been moved or replaced for 'not doing well' even when their local congregations love them and want them. Conversely, we routinely place evangelists over a congregation without even consulting the members, or allowing the leaders to be commended by those they will lead. And we expect these churches to abide by our decisions without dissent or question. Alternatively, church leaders have also remained for too long in situations where they were clearly not commended by their staff or members- simply because they have the backing and blessing of a higher power. But worst of all, several of our 'higher' leaders have gone exactly where *they* wanted to, and have had others moved out of the way just so they can take their city. It is difficult to imagine Paul or his contemporaries operating like this.

### On Our Self Description

In one generation, we have gone from protecting the flock to preserving our institution. What has been our agenda, other than keeping control over our congregations? We have made incredible statements about the ICOC that gall our critics and keep our members 'committed'. We call ourselves 'God's Modern Day Movement', and say that we are 'defining Christianity

for this generation'. We have equated ourselves with the 'Kingdom' as if we are one and the same, and not merely part of the Kingdom – a Kingdom that belongs to a King, and is known by God alone. When we call ourselves the 'One True Church', our arrogance does several things. a) By implication, almost everything we say must be right, because we are the right church. b) Therefore: comply, don't question, and don't even think about leaving. Where can you go? It's either 'us' – or the gates of hell.

Accept it or not-this statement alone is our most powerful mechanism for ensuring compliance and 'commitment.' I am not going 'liberal' on the doctrine of salvation, or claiming that 'other' churches are saved- there really is only one universal church, and one way to become a Christian. However, by calling ourselves by these names, and claiming it with such exclusivity and superiority, many of our disciples *will* remain 'faithful', but also living in fear and misery.

Because so many of us have been conditioned to acquiesce, we just keep slipping in more and more control mechanisms and *unbiblical* practices without discussion or debate. The reason: 'being unified is more important than being right'. Sometimes, to be sure, but not more important than being righteous.

## 2. Our Obsession With Numbers

- *'Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel'* Paul
- *'Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice'* James
- *'So neither he who plants nor he who sows is anything, but only God, who makes things grow'* Paul

Publicly stated or not, but for all practical purposes:

Numerical growth, specifically baptisms, has been our number one objective-*even at the expense of goodness and godliness.*

Many of our leaders have become so obsessive about 'the numbers' it has retarded them spiritually, made them neurotic, or even idolatrous. What started out as a genuine and intense effort to evangelize the world in one generation has quickly turned sour from false motives and selfish ambition. The motives for what we do and why we do it have become so askew that I am afraid many will not be able to recover. Selfish ambition and humanism have led to the systematic abuse of stats and stat- taking, goal setting and goal making. This has ruined countless lives in the process, damaged our integrity and trustworthiness as ministers and leaders, and has fostered a climate of manipulation, fear and men pleasing. The consciences of thousands, especially new and vulnerable staff members and new Bible Talk or Family Group leaders have been violated. And they in turn have compelled others to do the same. This is systemic-a phenomenon that reaches from top to bottom. This cannot be denied.

'Stats are a tool', we have said. I agree, but what kind of tool? A hammer and a knife-for bashing and inflicting pain on those we are over. They have become a means to satisfy the secret ambitions of unscrupulous men. They are routinely used to cajole and threaten, or to appease the anger of those over us. We have used them to lift up men and to boast and brag.

Of course, stats in and of themselves are only bits of information, nothing really, much like bits of wood and clay. It is how they can be twisted and used for idolatry that I am concerned with. Accompanied by our pride and a corrupted hierarchical structure, they are too much for our fallen nature to bear.

I am all for knowing my ministry and the names of the sheep, and knowing if one has wondered from the ninety nine, and for being on top for budgetary purposes. And I think a census of some kind is very helpful for various reasons. I am even for sharing the great things God has done! (Acts 11) You know that's not what I mean.

I am talking about using stats to measure our worth before God and one another, preaching Christ from false motives, using the numbers to compare and compete, and to boost the ungodly egos of insecure and selfish men. Consider the almost universal ramifications of this emphasis in our churches. All of these examples, in one way or another, are the fruit of this bad theology and humanism. This is what I have seen, heard or been a part of over the past 20 years:

- I know of many cases of dishonesty in reporting stats. Whether to fudge or inflate attendances, or to not accurately do the 'month end' because 'we *have* to grow this month' or 'there is no way we are going negative!'
- I know an evangelist who invented 'baptisms' to avoid harsh accountability.
- We have practiced and even theologically defended the wholesale write-off of members in the name of 'pruning'. Not only is this phenomenon repugnant, it is completely without Biblical precedent. Jesus commanded-leave them alone -'let the wheat and the tares grow together'. Are we stronger or wiser than he? How arrogant of us-it is Christ's own church we have pillaged, his own body we have mutilated!
- We have taken off, prematurely, the very weak or very discouraged, because we want a 'tight ship' Entire families have been ruined by this conceit and immaturity. We have, in short, slaughtered the innocents.
- It is almost a truism that each new evangelist that takes over a ministry will prune and purge. Why does this happen, really? We all know. It is the need to look good from 'your' new beginning, or not to be blamed for 'their' weak ministry in the future. When we do this, we have betrayed ourselves to angels, my friend-angels that rejoiced before the face of God when they were first converted! Should not the Christ-like servant wait for the sure evidence of God before making membership decisions; before whacking and hacking? The deeper we go with these questions, the more obvious our systemic evils become.
- The majority of our baptisms come near the end of the month. Why is that? Some, embarrassingly, just before midnight. And why is it the vast majority of those same baptisms are those who will fall away?
- How many times have we *hurt for ourselves* when a goal or target is not met instead of weeping for the lost? Something is grievously and seriously wrong here
- We rank each other, all the time, in our hearts and even in public on 'the numbers' - our faith, heart, talent, holiness, self- worth, awesomeness or 'lack of ministry skills' are constantly being judged. And most of this from pride, jealousy, insecurity, competitiveness or rank humanism. Do true men of God, really, have to be led by a system of carrots and sticks? Or should it be by something more substantial, like love and moral obligation and the consequences of rejecting the gospel?
- How many Christians have we neglected when they moved into our ministries from other cities? Why is that, honestly? 'If they are weak, and we put them on our

membership list, they might fall away and we will look bad' Great, let them prove themselves all over again! Of course, because of this evil conceit they just might fall away- but their blood will be on our head.

- We are constantly insecure, especially at conferences and such, or at staff meetings, if the numbers are 'below average'
- The more baptisms, or better numbers- the more glory, the more speaking 'rights', the more respect.
- We have gone from 'anytime, day or night urgency' to saving up baptisms for Sundays (to encourage the church!) to anniversary services, where the goal is to have a hundred or some other large number on a day (to encourage the movement!) Saving up to have one hundred in a day, or even shooting for it, is not encouraging at all, it is degrading the gospel. And is always suspect. Does this inspire the angels or embarrass them? First, we must have them make it by the end of the month, then, we must hold them off for our special service! Is this not simple pride and duplicity? Even Schizophrenia?
- Where did 'good' 'great' and 'awesome' come from and why? Why do we tolerate this humanism and pressure inducing dumbness? Some have even put 'poor' on their stat sheets. That sure is encouraging for the interns! Isn't this all a bit embarrassing?
- The LA Ratio. What is that? What if we had an apostolic ratio, or a Pauline ratio or an Antioch ratio? Would that not bury us in shame? Maybe that is why there is not even the remotest hint of such in Scripture. God loves us too much.
- In earlier days, we have 're-baptized' hundreds and claimed them on our stat sheets as first time 'baptisms'- as if trying to fool everyone. I know this practice has ceased, but it revealed an ominous foreshadowing of our present obsession/validation by numbers.
- I was in a church where 95% of the staff felt conflicted about a specific goal they were expected to 'get behind' and make sure 'everyone else gets behind it'. Mercifully, God allowed us to fail-but through it all, no one spoke up. Only months later were the staff honest about their inner conflicts. How is that possible? (That will lead me to my cowardice point a little later on.) Those who did speak up in private were rebuked.
- We know of almost an entire staff in one of our largest churches that falsified attendances and membership numbers. Several were fired. Where does that kind of behavior come from? Could it be from the religious culture we have created for ourselves? What 'force' could be more powerful than the fear of God? Our culture of fear and men pleasing!
- We *keep* people in 'our' ministries because it will 'hurt our numbers' if they leave. Even if their desire is best for the person, or will bring them closer to their family, or legitimately help their careers. 'Bloom where you are planted, go where you are sent'. How can we assume to know what the Spirit's intention or individual will is? What's wrong with a change of scenery? We do it all the time. Shame on us.
- We have consistently judged the 'sharp' or prominent of greater worth than the poor or less talented - because of what they can accomplish 'for the church'. We are judges with evil thoughts, said James.
- Many have neglected the weak because they are a 'distraction' and take too much 'real' ministry time. Excuse me? We will not go after the strays heart and soul, but we will go after the numbers. The pressure to build well (justice, love, mercy) or to build fast is a constant conflict among men of good conscience. How many of us have built on wood or straw because of short cuts and the constant pressure to perform?

- We are constantly bragging about our ‘fruit’ and our ‘numbers’ and our ‘impact’ and then, reflexively declare, ‘And to God be the glory!’ In fact, the entire concept of ‘personal fruit’ as we know and have taught it a thousand times is Biblically irresponsible.
- How many of us have compromised our own conscience and baptized someone just to make a manmade goal or to keep our selves from being ‘yelled at’ or publicly shamed or simply to please a man?
- ‘If we don’t have a monthly stat sheet, how are we going to grow the ministry?’ How did they do it in the early church, which was the most formidable of all? Did all of their leaders have a piece of papyrus?
- In most of our churches, our Christians routinely study hard with our converts until their ‘baptism’, and then do almost nothing afterwards in terms of consistent, mature follow up. We make babies, and let them die of neglect because we want to make more babies! In the world, we would be imprisoned.
- Sector leaders/FG leaders routinely give out foolish, even asinine advice to appease ‘the god of growth’ (or ‘lord’ of the Lords Day!)-‘Don’t go to that wedding, it will hurt your ministry’ ‘I know its your family, but this is the family of God, come back for Sunday’ ‘ You can go on holidays sure, but only for this long ...’ ‘*You* made the goal-you’re responsible to get them ready. Just do it’ ‘Do you have to visit that other sector or church, it’s going to hurt our attendance?’
- Why are we always ‘cleaning’ up our membership rolls in December? Is it not possible we might be off track here because of a human timetable and not a divine one? All we have to do is follow a kind of ‘and why do we do this?’ trail of questions to know exactly the reason. It cannot be for Christ’s name or glory. Or is it simply because Janus, the god of the Romans, bids us to?
- Have you ever heard this ‘When you set a goal (even if *you* didn’t want to)-you have to make it’? Of course we have to, or we will suffer the consequences- or at least feel stupid.
- Admit it, as bad as this sounds, sometimes we even feel validated when others are not doing well in their ministries. And envy creates even more ungodly thoughts than that.
- ‘If you are a good leader, *and know what you’re doing*, you should be able to predict your targets accurately, 80-90% of the time.’ Does this contribute to our humility or our humanism? Won’t this kind of arrogance only lead to a violation of conscience? Does this really make us ‘better leaders’? No it doesn’t, but it gets more ‘baptisms’ by month-end!
- Our practice of taking other leaders from other churches, sometimes *by the hundreds* so we can have ‘the biggest’ and best church in our city, and to satisfy the demands of those ‘over’ us is hardly inspiring to anyone. Instead, it has created massive disrespect and division. All because of numbers. Nothing more.
- And finally, one of our most seasoned and respected evangelists admitted ‘he had not been sending out church plantings because it would diminish his numbers at home – and that he did this to keep his leaders from being *on him* because of his numbers’

I could give 100 more examples, easily. And so could you. The point is, we have sacrificed our self- respect and perhaps some of our own souls on this altar. This is not building for the glory of God, but for the glory of man.

God, because of his own love for the lost, has not blessed *us* with conversions; he has blessed *them* for His own sake. I believe He has *used us*- in spite of our selfish ambition,

just as we have used others. God has accomplished His 'own' dreams for the lost-even if much of it has been through 'our' dreams for ourselves.

We have ranked and competed and defiled and manipulated, even used others, to satisfy the wants and needs of sinful pride or insecurity -and to please the men who are 'over us' and 'over them' and 'over them' etc. None of us are immune. And for what? The praises of men and not the praises of God, the fear of men and not the fear of God.

We have turned what is the most consequential and beautiful act in the eyes of God for another human being-their union with Christ- into an object of personal glory. But when the true motives and intentions of our hearts will one day be exposed, then what? Our salvation, not just our reward, might be at stake.

In my experience many of you, if not most, will agree with what I am saying. Perhaps every last one of you. But why have we not stopped this madness? Why does it go on and on when most of us hate it so? And in our hearts feel guilt, if not shame? Because 'that's just the way it is'? No- but because it's another systemic evil, another pillar in our belief system that must be smashed.

The more souls saved the better, I agree- but for whom and why? When our integrity and true intentions have been so universally exposed and smeared -it cannot be for the glory of God alone. That is self-contradictory. Of course, several of you have matured beyond men pleasing and have sincerely sought to guard your hearts, and do have a 'pure conscience' before God. But kingdom wide, this simply is not the case.

For the most part, I believe the majority of us have tried to shield the rank and file believer from this 'private' clerical obsession of ours, and from the pressures placed on our own shoulders by other men. But somehow, it spreads throughout our fellowship anyway. The 'having and getting' of numbers-even at the expense of goodness and godliness- is a practice so widespread, so endemic to who we are *it will never stop*- until admitted, confessed and publicly repudiated. I, for one, will never again send in a monthly stat sheet as we know and use them. I don't care what the repercussions, I am not doing it. Another evangelist just said to me, incredulously, 'You have to, because LA wants them'-my point exactly.

### **3.Our Shameful Arrogance**

Good examples:

- *'I am meek and lowly'* Jesus
- *'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey'* Zechariah
- *'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant'* Paul

Bad examples:

- *"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."* Jesus
- *'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your heart. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight'* Jesus

By and large, we have been extremely arrogant. I would even say, we have become a breeding ground for proud and arrogant men. Moses' lapse into arrogance cost him dearly. And David's own pride cost him the lives of 70,000 Israelites. Are we better than them?

Year by year and brick by brick, we have built a gate so high it is pleading for destruction. But our pride and determination to believe that God is with us 'no matter what', and that he has approved or blessed virtually every decision we have made has severely blinded our judgment of reality.

When Moses sinned against God by declaring to Israel, 'How long shall *we* put up with you' he spoke what is in the hearts of many of us. This is exactly the kind of mentality we operate by. Because of our 'me and God' arrogance, we have routinely slapped grown men in the face. Paul reprimanded the Corinthians for submitting to such leaders, but this kind of 'slapping' is this very thing we expect others to submit to. And we will not tolerate men who want to push us or slap us back.

Paul declares, 'You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that.' We too have enslaved and exploited and pushed and slapped grown men in the face. In our shameful arrogance, we have *forced* grown men to comply, even against their consciences. Something Paul would never do. Something Jesus never did.

What is the further proof of our arrogance? Besides our entire hierarchy and control mechanisms, there are many: Not only have we allowed it, but we have sustained the cult of personality. We have created and accepted titles that have in turn created barriers and strengthened the clergy / laity mindset. This of course has led to the widespread exaltation of men.

In the spirit of, 'Where the Bible is silent, we speak', we have routinely gone 'beyond what is written'.

Like the Pharisee who 'prayed about himself', we have built monuments and timelines to ourselves and not for the glory of God. We are always restoring but never renouncing because we can do no wrong. We have pillaged and plundered other churches because of the wishes and desires of despotic men-who must have the biggest and best churches because, 'it is a sin not to be the biggest church in your city' But even after they are plundered, more bricks are demanded!

We are constantly numbering Israel, when even Joab, Israel's worldly national security commander found it repugnant!

We have evolved into a culture where the oppression and squashing of godly men is acceptable, even the norm. Where 'get in line, or get out' is said, where 'make the numbers or get another job' is casually declared, where 'comply or die' is an unspoken truth. There is a reason God has appointed us the leaders – we must be 'better men' -so shut up and listen!

We have pruned the souls of men into damnation. This is not a membership list we cut up, but Christ himself. 'Why do you persecute me?' could just as easily be, 'Why do you prune me?' In doing so we have played the role of final Judge, we have assumed the prerogatives of God Himself (John 15)

We have taught that we alone are the 'true kingdom', 'true disciples', and the 'One True Church'. And not only do we believe these things, but we intensely advocate them- *we* know what we are doing, *we* have restored such and such, *we* are the remnant chosen by grace, *we* are the only church since the first century to...

We have built, *by design*, (or at the very least have not dismantled it by design) a culture of control and intimidation that shuts down and marginalizes men and women who 'disagree'. This is an absolute abuse of power and total betrayal of our freedom in Christ.

In some of our churches, rich leaders are getting richer. In some of our churches, the prophets and priests rule by their own authority. In some of our churches, its 'give' or get out. In some of our churches, LA for one, its have a discipleship partner or 'go away'. But go where if we are the 'one true church'? Obviously, to hell. Arrogance, pure and simple.

Our wholesale dismissal of critics is appalling. How can we be sure Christ is not speaking to us *through* them? After all, was Christ Himself not so offended by the arrogance of the Laodicean church that he was no longer 'within' their fellowship – but stood outside the door and knocked? We have offered no public apologies for anything substantial.

In fact, by and large, we don't even listen to our own Christians- because if we did we would not be in such a crisis. Many of them ( including several outside critics) have known all along what most of us cannot even recognize! Our 'ever hearing but never perceiving' stubbornness has created frustration and anxiety and anger in our members beyond words.

We constantly pull rank where there is not a single example of this kind of 'rulership' in Scripture. We have consistently tied up heavy burdens and placed them on men's shoulders. Several of you, I know, have even taken another man's 'pasture' and home at will, without consent or conscience. But you, like the Jewish ruling council, will do anything not to have the Romans 'take your place and nation'

In like spirit, we have routinely protected those 'above' because 'what if the critics found out' or 'it will cause the weaker among us to stumble'. This is a direct violation of scripture – even our elders who sin must be rebuked publicly 'so that others may be warned'. Because of these sins and others like them, we have received our reward in full, in praise and in power, in ' long flowing robes and greetings in the market place' But in the meantime, God's sons and daughters have been devastated.

There is no Jerusalem or Antioch of the movement, or Jesus or Paul of the movement. We have no 'anointed' men like David, and no one man who is God's hope for the world.

Is this kind of arrogance really the by-product of a 'remnant chosen by grace' or something more sinister? Or, if we believe like Paul, that we are what we are 'by the grace of God', then why have we not acted this way? Why do we talk the way we do?

This kind of shameful arrogance has both started and sustained our structural evils. In London, we are reaping the fruit of this kind of behavior right now. We forced ourselves on others, and now they force themselves on us. We slapped others in the name of Jesus, and now they slap back, justifiably so!

Look at us. In just over 20 years we have gone from 'the happy few' to a full-blown denomination. And even more so, to a corrupted hierarchy with more personal control mechanisms than the modern Catholic Church, and with more bravado than the Pharisees

themselves. At least they were whitewashed tombs— much of their arrogance was not recognized by men, only by God. Ours has become obvious to all.

#### 4. Our Seduction By Money

- ‘*“You cannot serve both God and Money”*. *The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus*’. Matthew
- ‘*...you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?*’ James
- ‘*Children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well*’ Paul

When John preached in the desert, his call to repentance was all about ‘stuff’ and our attitude towards it: a coat, contentment, extortion. All of them money matters. We live in a kingdom where personal economics is an exacting requirement, especially for leaders.

However, like almost every religion or religious leader known to man, once corrupted by power and selfish interest, the lure of money and unjust gain simply cannot be resisted. It is a truism. We are no exception. And neither were the religious elite of Jesus’ day.

I will continue with four more quotations:

- ‘The attitude we have toward our money and possessions reaches to the depth of us, to the very nature of our existence.’
- ‘Our stewardship tells a deep and consequential story. It forms our biography. In a sense, how we relate to money is the story of our lives.’
- ‘Who is greedier than a man for whom God is not enough.’?
- ‘The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality’

If these Scriptures and statements are true for simple Christians, then how much more so for leaders in the Kingdom of God- those ‘upon whom the end of the ages has come’ and who live ‘in the last days’?

To be sure, those of us who preach the gospel full-time should earn our living by the gospel. But what kind of living? Should it not be with the simplicity and almost embarrassing self-consciousness of the apostles? Would that not do more to encourage sacrifice among the saints than anything else? Or to re-ignite our badly damaged credibility? Or to silence and shame our critics?

This is one area of Scripture we have clearly failed to restore. And we all know why. Every year the seduction and surrender to money has become more and more widespread, especially in America. Jesus’ own life and example were a stern rebuke to the greed of the Pharisees. But when he challenged their duplicity, they sneered at him. What has our

response been? Have we sneered? Or tried to minimize the Lord's words? 'You are those who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your heart' he rebukes.

If we are the ones who are 'defining Christianity for this generation', what are we defining in terms of money and materialism? If we accept the premise that our first responsibility as Christian leaders is to define reality, then surely, the one New Testament reality we have 'disembodied' is this one.

The reason is simple: money *really is* the acid test of our sincerity and spirituality- and our failure to obey the vital examples and instructions of Scripture *en masse* is another reason I believe it is a systemic evil, but especially endemic to the West. (Don't challenge me on greed, and I won't challenge you on materialism)

Many of you of course are a noble exception to this, Mark and Nadine being one. And certainly the hundreds of servants who toil on in foreign lands, especially in the third world. But by and large, and in particular in the West, our credibility as 'heaven-ward' men is crashing fast to earth.

Money is not merely a tool, or even a drug-it is a god. A god who must be defied, not deified- especially by full-time servants of the Lord. Christ's personification of Mammon in the hearing of the Pharisees should make all of us pause to search our own souls. But instead of caution and trepidation, what has happened?

There are now so many questions about golden parachutes, the special contribution, salary compensations, wasteful spending, and the misappropriation of funds that it is frightening. As the 'clergy', we have allowed for incredible retreats and pet projects: we have had harbor retreats, mountain retreats, castle and Hawaiian retreats, deep-sea fishing expeditions, five star hotels, presidential suites and the like; we have purchased unnecessary business class tickets and even season tickets to basket-ball leagues; no doubt we enjoy robust salaries, houses and perks. The higher up the pyramid- the greater the 'responsibility' factor- the better it gets: fatter paychecks, richer incidentals. We have the best cars, the best electronics, the best homes, the best schools, the best neighborhoods, the best clothes, and the best benefits.

We give golden parachutes to those forced to resign when others who are 'let go', after years of dedication, are sometimes not even mentioned in the next staff meeting as though an embarrassment has occurred. I agree legalities have been maintained, but this is God's money not ours. Appearances and real issues of greed have now caused thousands to stumble and question our spirituality. A former GSL stated it like this, 'Can we really expect sincerity from men who have placed a higher value on their paychecks and all the accompanying perks than they have on being true to their conscience?' That's an honest, unemotional observation from a guy deep within our system of things.

I am all for breaking the alabaster jar from time to time and even honoring guest speakers. I think this is right. I personally have been on many retreats and have benefited and been refreshed by the generosity of other leaders and their ministries. And truth be told, a large majority of Christians are more than happy to 'reward' their hard working staff members this way. They are grateful for our service and understand the pressures our families and we are under. But is it right or responsible to continue in light of wide scale allegations and concerns? Is it right to have rich leaders in an age of suspicion? Is it right to put any stumbling block in anyone's path if we are ministers of the gospel? If so, said Paul, then we

are no longer acting in love. And truthfully, have these retreat expenses and the like been made public? In detail? Or only from a generic 'pot' mentioned in a slide show?

A sacred trust is set in place between those who ask and those who give- a trust that must be upheld at all cost. Every penny we receive and spend is a matter of love and respect for our Christians, especially the poorest among us. It also is a matter of personal integrity and the fear of God. We are no longer above reproach. I am not throwing stones here. I too am guilty. I too am deeply convicted.

We have no choice but to open the books and be utterly transparent in our expenses, especially those that might convey even a 'hint of greed.' Mike Taliaferro once told me, 'If you can't say it before a thousand people, it's probably not right'. Good advice. We must *once again* take pains not only to do what is legally right, but also what is Christ-like and commendable in the eyes of men and God. Only from specific accountability and transparency - not from evasive pie charts at the end of the year- will the total confidence and blessing of the saints be had once again, as well as commending our consciences to the poorest among our flock, the single moms in our fellowship, those who struggle week after week to support us, and the critics who are baying for blood.

Are we not alarmed when we find out a communist leader has a beautiful villa? Or when hard line mullahs have running water and air conditioning when nobody else in their village does? How much more should the church be appalled when her leaders live near the 'top of the scale', or convey a double standard and love for the world? Was this not at least one of the evils of Eli's sons?

How we flesh out the words of Scripture is a challenge, I know. But flesh them out we must. We have no choice anymore. Too much is at stake. True or not, many of us give *the impression* of being a hireling, a peddler, a white washed tomb or prophet at Ahab's table. We have no option but to change because the gospel is now being discredited.

I too have children and want the best for them. This is a natural, parental instinct. But what really *is* best for them? And should not a life of simplicity and frugality-even for our families- be another cup that we who enter the full-time ministry must drink? Even more radical to our thinking, is it not true that the wives of the apostles accompanied them *and worked* so that their husbands could preach? (1 Cor.9.3-6) And why was this? Why had they refused to burden the church for even a few more denarii's? Because of personal credibility and the desire to be above reproach. This is a ministry paradigm that has hardly been explored. I will leave that one for our teachers to consider.

Brothers and sisters, we must ask ourselves, honestly: Am I embarrassed? Accused? Defensive? Apologetic? Proud? Would we be ashamed to stand before our poorest members, our widows and single mothers, even our critics, to have them in our homes-each and every one- and justify *our* lifestyles at *their* expense? Justifiable or not, inherited or not, the fruit of great stewardship or whatever - as ministers of an eternal kingdom, if our salaries or lifestyles are criticized by more than a few disgruntled members, or are a stumbling block to the rank and file in any way, we have to make some serious decisions.

We must ask ourselves, honestly: What is the real rationale behind 'more sphere of influence, more money'? It is not necessarily more or harder work. More pressure, perhaps. But even so, this kind of salary model is the exact *inversion* of apostolic teaching and

example. Paul: 'having nothing, and yet possessing everything.' Peter: 'Silver and gold I have none.' Accept it or not, if money is our motive in *any* guise, Jesus said, we have received 'our reward in full.'

Should we as leaders not *exemplify* the spirituality and sacrifice we call others to make, in fact, have demanded that they make? (You fill in the Scripture)

- In our own sacrificial giving/and living?
- In our desire for equality?
- In our demonstration of real justice?
- To exemplify contentment and the joy of simplicity?
- To do everything possible to ease the burdens on the church?
- So that nothing may be wasted?
- To identify with the poor, and not insult them?
- To flee from even a 'hint' of greed? (A text we are ruthless in applying to sexual sins, but blatantly hypocritical when it comes to greed)
- To prove that we too, are disciples first and foremost?
- To 'show' that we belong to a better country?
- To illustrate how a disciple can resist the plague of commercialism / consumerism?
- To disarm the critics and truly be above reproach?
- To imitate Christ's own poverty/simplicity?
- To flesh out the truths: 'I am crucified with Christ' and 'the world has been crucified to me and I to the world'?
- To restore what is clearly apostolic in practice and spirit: 'poor, yet making many rich' 'we will gladly spend everything we have *for you*, and spend ourselves as well' 'We made no use of our rights' etc?

If we never pushed so hard to get money from our Christians, it would still matter a great deal to God, but not nearly as much as it does now, because of our constant asking and coercive 'getting'.

We have demanded extraordinary monetary sacrifice from our members, but comparatively, it appears we have demanded so little from ourselves. That is, if we gauge from what is 'left over' and not from what is 'given'.

Jesus exposed and cursed the Pharisees for their 'open' greed, their 'hidden' greed, their 'denial' of greed and their duplicity. He calls it 'the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things.' He commanded us to be on guard against 'all kinds of greed', even if the source may be legitimate-like an inheritance.

Consider carefully: greed is one of the very few specific sins named in the New Testament a Christian should be dis-fellowshipped for (1 Corinthians 5), and yet, in the richest and most consumer oriented country in the history of mankind, the USA-have you ever heard of even one person put out of the fellowship for this? Greed is idolatry, greed is deceitful, and greed will cost us 'our inheritance among the saints' Very powerful stuff, indeed.

## All Or Nothing

All these structural/systemic evils are entangled and intertwined. They will continue throughout our churches until universally and 'officially' addressed. Because our religious culture is so cohesive and conformist, it must be all or nothing. But if the choice becomes 'some things' instead of all or nothing, we will have major problems on our hands. In that case, *the only exception or escape from their continued influence would be to practice or demand Biblical autonomy.* (More on that later)

As I stated before, if we continue to tolerate our systemic evils, and I say this with caution, **our personal salvation** may very well be at stake, let alone our unity and personal credibility. We simply cannot afford the luxury of thinking we are an exception, immune, or above obedience to the commands of God-no matter how much God has used us in the past. That is one of the most spectacular fruits of pride.

When we refuse to be confronted ourselves, or we become complacent or defiant when the Scriptures challenge us-even to the core-we are in grave spiritual danger. And our hypocrisy will have come full circle. We love the revolutionary, but not if it is to overthrow us. We commend the Bereans for questioning Paul, but not if they question us. We love the radical spirit of Josiah, unless he digs up our bones for exposure. We want opinion leaders, but not if their opinion is against us. We love to denounce the blind Pharisees, but refuse to see the Pharisee in us. We love the simplicity of Christ -'only one thing is needful', and the apostles - 'poor, yet making many rich', but not if it is a discomfort to us

There is a time for patience and even having dinner with the Sadducees and Pharisees, and then there is a time for anger and the overthrowing of temples. I believe that time is now. Our errors and sins must be vigorously attacked and overthrown. Christ was hostile to a religious system then, and he is hostile to our religious system now. Too much is at stake. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against demons and their strongholds. This is no time for cowards. This is no time for calm deliberation or for lighting candles instead of cursing the darkness; this is a time for setting fire to the earth.

We *must* apologize. No more spin, no more skirting the issues. We cannot move forward without acknowledging our past. There will be no bright future without peering into what has been ugly in our history. I know that even now many changes are taking place in several churches throughout the world, but moving forward without acknowledging our past is a huge mistake that will continue to haunt us.

What is the purpose of a public apology? To humble ourselves before God and men. To help us become broken and ashamed of our sins. To demonstrate true repentance and restoration. To prove to our beloved disciples that we 'get it' - and in doing so, bring some kind of closure to hurting or embittered Christians. To diffuse those criticisms that *are* valid and unrelenting. But most important of all, to please our God, and perhaps, prayerfully, bring back into the fold once again those who have been scattered because of hurt or abuse or consciences that could not live within 'our system'.

## Wide Scale Problems and Concerns

Here are other concerns I wish to bring into discussion-and I am hardly alone in this- as well as tough but honest questions, and accepted theologies that must be debated. In no particular order:

**1. We have had** well over a quarter million men and women leave our churches. Many have fallen away, of course. Perhaps, the majority. But tens of thousands have walked away *with* their God. We simply do not admit this. We have insisted, thoughtlessly and to the continuing hurt and dismay of many, that anyone who leaves our ranks, for whatever the reason, have fallen away from God. This just cannot be, and in truth, borders on the immoral. We know, even if we will not admit it publicly, that we ourselves have mistakenly ‘pruned’ hundreds away! No, not all have left their God –they simply left our fellowship to make it on their own. Let us admit the truth-thousands were marginalized, rebuked, misunderstood, wearied, or forced to follow their consciences out the door. Others, scattered by harsh and brutal leadership (Ez34)

**2. Related to this**, but hardly the only reason, there is now an entire sub-culture of enemies and critics that simply will not go away until we publicly admit and apologize for our mistakes and sins.

**3. Overall trust** in our movement’s leadership, in those ‘reputed to be pillars’ as well as those directly ‘under them’ has been seriously compromised. But more urgent still, trust in local leadership has also been compromised, and even more so because of proximity. (London is the loudest and angriest proof of this at the moment)

**4. The cult of** personality has finally caught up, and has betrayed our immaturity and men-pleasing nature. Why did we wait so long for this to happen? And why did we let it happen to begin with?

**5. By and large**, we have not lead as men of courage and conscience. I am afraid that in the eyes of many hurting and betrayed Christians- those who entrusted and submitted themselves to our leadership - we are now perceived as cowards and cronies, men pleasers and peddlers of the gospel. (Again, London is our proof right now of these sentiments -but you know exactly what I mean) Yes, we have admitted to our abuses and legalisms and insensitivities and obsessions with numbers, but also, to our great shame, that *we could do nothing about it*. For how long must God’s sons and daughters tolerate this manhandling by the arrogant? Or the cowardice of ‘men of God’ who do nothing to rescue his children? Even more frightening, for how much longer will God tolerate it? We have not stood up for the rights and needs of ‘our sheep’ before all else. And perhaps most damning of all, we have almost uniformly come to the defense of our shepherds first, and not to our sheep. Shame on us all!

**6. Unfortunately**, too many of our prophets are fed from the kings table and simply will not risk discomfort, financial insecurity or the warmth of men’s praises. Christian’s all over the world are hurting and bitterly disappointed that godly men do not have the love or conscience to do what they believe is right for those in their care. But how can they, really? Our own ministry staff suffers too; they also are victims of selfish autocrats and abuses from within ‘the system’ They are caught in the crossfire, from above *and* below. I know this will sound harsh and unfair, and to some extent it is, but more than a few in London want specific staff members to be sacked, and several even the entire staff, simply out of frustration- I will spare you the quotes. They feel used and betrayed.

**7. We easily** put up with ‘super-apostles’ and harsh or autocratic leaders in our churches- those who love to ‘slap us in the face’- simply because of expedience or misplaced loyalties. Or more disturbing, because ‘we have no one else to take their place’ But surely a church with no leader (and comforted by the Spirit) is better than a church with a bad

leader (who has quenched the Spirit)! Few things break my heart more than to see men I love and respect make decisions based on 'loyalty' and 'expedience' and 'years of service' and 'favor-swapping', to the utter disregard of what is moral or pleasing to God.

**8.Sadly**, although the so called the LA unity/governance conference was no doubt sincere and had great intentions- it has once again failed to address our real problems right now-our systemic evils. Even before the LA meeting took place, one GCL expressed his feelings like this:

*The movement at this point has become a farce. The top leaders will meet in week to discuss governance, while Rome burns. The souls of 250,000 fall aways cry out against the very foundational structure of our churches, yet their aggregate value cannot even motivate an official apology, much less a meeting of the worlds leaders.*

As several of you who participated may know-your public announcement after the fact has already been met with a degree of suspicion, even cynicism. 'More spin, not enough depth, not enough substance, what's *really* going to change?' 'Why should we trust those guys anymore?' 'They never stood up in the first place, why should we believe they have integrity and courage now?'

Our lack of unity and dysfunctional relationships are not from a structural model that has 'outstripped the spiritual needs of our churches', but is the ongoing fruit of a corrupted hierarchy, sustained and controlled by fallen human nature -proud and selfish. That is all.

Why can't we see this? We will never be, and never **can** be, truly united again until we ruthlessly and painfully and theologically examine and expose our systemic evils. *They* are what divide us, and always will divide us. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against demonic strongholds. Even the Pharisees – that seemingly unified group, were never truly united. Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees. But in his own words, 'we lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another'

Proof: Isn't it true, be honest, that many of you are still angry and slanderous, are 'out to get so and so' and ready to 'bring down so and so'? Isn't it true that many of you, be honest, will still fight tooth and nail to not lose *your* 'position' of prominence or to not have to relinquish *your* need for control and forced conformity? And isn't it just as true, that almost no-one resigns, no matter what their problems or how long they lasted, without 'serious persuasion'? I know it's true. I heard some of your own voices on my phone. The question is, *why* is it true?

Structural changes and more local autonomy and the resignation of a few prominent leaders and honesty sessions and open forums will just not work. Our problems are so much deeper than that. So much deeper in fact, they are demonic, and therefore must be 'exorcised'. Structural, systemic evils have strangled us, our relationships, our integrity, and our unity. Why can't we see this? Why *won't* we see this? It is painful and very discouraging. Changing a few hats and names, and having a six-month 'issues and co-operation' council is moot.

**9.There is** a significant, even radical, gap between the 'clergy and laity' in our churches. The 'the priesthood of all believers' is now in serious question. The lack of voice, the lack of 'in the trenches' understanding and empathy, the lack of non -staff representation and decision-making powers, the lack of leaders who are legitimately 'commended' by those they lead, the lack of disclosure and transparency, the pay scale differences as well as autocratic leadership styles-and those darn front row seats-have all contributed to an ever widening problem.

**10. Why is it** that so many of our top leaders have taken so long to repent? Or refused to be disciplined themselves when they are the vanguard of a ‘discipling movement’? Why have some even taken years? What has the WSL ‘discipleship group’ been doing? Why have our kingdom teachers and elders not been more prophetic? Or why have our GSL discipleship groups not been more courageous? Have not our own protection and misplaced loyalties encouraged, even rewarded spiritual complacency? ‘You don’t understand,’ we ‘were hamstrung’, ‘powerless’, we ‘tried but there was nothing we could do’ ‘you had to be a part of it to appreciate the dynamics’ and ‘don’t be naive’. This is a 2 fold indictment against us: It proves that we are a religious culture that controls by fear and intimidation, and also a culture of cowards and conflict avoiders - right to the top.

The double standards and duplicity is embarrassing. We expect non Christians to radically change - leave their families, careers, relationships and addictions within a matter of weeks and days, even demand it in order for them to be baptized- but many of our top leaders are given years to repent and yet remain in their positions of authority, challenging and ‘changing’ our lives!

**11. Kip’s resignation** letter, although sincere, is not enough. His letter was very moving (I cried for a couple days), but his personal life and failures as a man are not of greatest concern. Every one sins. Many leaders fall and will fall, including great men of God. The truth is, the way we have structured and sustained things, Kips fall was *Biblically inevitable*. The main problem is that Kip never addressed the specific ‘sins of our system’ He did not even mention them, let alone repudiate them.

This is no longer about Kip or a few high profile resignations-the future and integrity of our movement is at stake. Our hierarchy, ‘formalized’ discipleship structure, legalism, and systemic abuses must be admitted as a failure - no matter how painful it will be for any of us, including Kip. It was a great and sincere religious experiment, and God has worked through us in spite of our mistakes and misgivings, but new wine means new wineskins.

**12. The teaching** and belief that we are, *or ever have been*, the ‘One True Church’. This statement is patently arrogant, and necessarily offensive. How can we know? At best, we are only a part of the one true universal church of Christ, His body-the visible expression of Christ on earth. We are the church, I agree. And we are the true church, I agree. But to equate the ‘One True Church’ with the ICOC membership list and our organizational boundaries is wrong, even heretical. True, I personally have not come across others ‘like ourselves’ per se, but even the prophet Elijah was blind to the higher purposes of God in his own generation-and he truly was an inspired man. Can we not be? We still know of several groups who teach the same plan of salvation- many of us came from that background.

Although we may publicly deny that we teach this as such -at least to the press and our critics - many of us, especially the rank and file believer adhere to this conviction as a matter of life and death. I hear it said again and again, but it cannot possibly be proven, it is utterly arrogant, it cannot be theologically defended, and it must be repudiated. To be clear, I am not saying ‘other churches are saved’ -because there is and always has been only one true church. But its organizational boundaries can never be, will never be known. Only God knows those who are His. And He is always full of surprises

To summarize: We are the church, but we cannot say the ICOC is the One True Church.

We are Christians only, but we cannot say we are the only Christians. Our membership list does not constitute the fullness, or the mystery of the invisible and spiritual body of Christ.

**13. We have crystallized** into a denomination. We have gone from a ‘rag tag band of brothers’ to the International Churches of Christ in just over 20 years. I know this is hard to hear, especially since we teach against it in our ‘Word Study’. But it is true. And I am only saying openly what many of us think in private. We are the ‘ICOC’ and have an acknowledged founder, Kip. (Until this statement, as made on KNN, is renounced, that is what has been taught) ‘I’m in the ‘ICOC’ is now a catchphrase. (I think it is offensive, personally, as in, ‘My Savior is J.C.’ but it proves my point)

We have a well-defined hierarchy. We have our own head quarters. We have our own names and terminologies. We have our unique theology and we know – exactly - who is in and out of our membership. With minor variations we follow the same patterns and traditions in all of our churches. And the same systemic evils are certainly widespread. We fellowship no others. We have ‘official’ websites, and ‘official’ publications, and ‘official’ news networks and an ‘official’ board. We have become a denomination. We have an elephant in the living room and our head in the sand. Not a good combination.

We have gone from an ‘informally’ acknowledged leader, a ragged band of brothers, scum and refuse of the world, from the one suitcase challenge, personal convictions and voluntary sacrifice, from utterly spontaneous special contributions and almost no weekly accountability or month end stats, from joy and prayer and faith with our three dollar maps hanging on the wall and jostling to target and plant churches in foreign countries- to a movement, a family of churches, a family business, a corporation, and now a full blown denomination. What has happened to us? We have replaced authentic Spirit led leadership for an unspiritual, almost corporate like autocracy.

**14. Our movement** is *not* ‘The Kingdom’. The Kingdom is greater than the church or any movement of men. We are Christians, the privileged citizens of this kingdom, but that is all. We are baptized into the kingdom, and have a King, but the ‘kingdom of God’ is infinitely and eternally superior to a religious movement or membership list. Why have our teachers not renounced this or forced a discussion on this matter?

**15. KNN**, although extremely encouraging at times, is more and more regarded as a propaganda tool to further enforce our accepted practices and belief systems. It is about crystallizing, not exploring. Conformity, and not real unity. Perhaps nothing has contributed to our cult of personality more than KNN.

**16. Coercive giving** is practiced, wide-scale. Of course there are many sincere and generous disciples who love to give, but the fact remains, our entire scheme for collecting the contribution is not based on the heart, or about love offerings, or true concern about the spiritual impact our system of ‘getting’ has on the rank and file Christian. That is not what is most important. Accountability, intense scrutiny and follow up and man made pressures are the order of the day. When a Christian is cajoled into a ‘multiple’, tacked down for their tithe, categorized on official spreadsheets for everyone to know so that sector leaders ‘can be on top’ - all to maintain budgets that *we have created*, this is coercive. Whether our plans and spending practices are noble or not, this type of contrived and controlled giving is utterly foreign to the spirit of the New Covenant. You know it as well as I do, but why do we keep on doing it? How we ‘get money’ and ‘make sure we make budget’ has evolved into one of our most invasive and grace- killing practices. And it has created untold bad feelings.

In my opinion, London has become one of the most frugal and responsible ministries in our fellowship when it comes to financial integrity. Compared to most western leaders, the staff in London are very frugal and self-conscious about appearances. But even here, the backlash over finances has been loud and unrelenting. Some see themselves 'on a holy mission from God' in the words of a region leader. Why is this? For the most part, it is simply the byproduct of coercive tactics in 'getting their contribution' to begin with, and of the pressure exerted from weekly and monthly accountability, and not from cheerful giving. The leadership here is very much on the defensive to justify their lifestyles at the churches expense.

Those who give joyfully easily forgive, and really don't care, and will even defend the lifestyle and expenditures of its leadership. But those who are coerced to give and feel burdened, or are made to feel guilty from missing their contribution will fight back hard over *any* financial 'appearances' or perceived improprieties. Real or not. That's just the way it is -and ought to be!

Consider just these verses from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 alone, in the order they appear: 'the grace that God has given' 'overflowing joy' 'rich generosity' 'entirely on their own' 'they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service' 'they gave themselves first' 'this act of grace' 'this grace of giving' 'I want to test the sincerity of your love' 'eager willingness' 'willingness' 'in order to honor the Lord' 'we want to avoid any criticism' 'this liberal gift' 'the proof of your love' 'the reason for our pride' 'your eagerness to help' 'your enthusiasm' 'the generous gift' 'not as one grudgingly given' 'decided in his heart' 'not reluctantly or under compulsion' 'God loves a cheerful giver' etc This kind of deeply personal and spiritual giving is not possible with our mechanisms of pressurized accountability in place. Full stop.

'If we don't hold them accountable, they won't give' So be it. Let us preach and teach more, even command when necessary (1 Timothy 6). Let us base our budgets on what is truthful in giving not on budgets we have set to further our own agenda, good or bad. Once our giving is 'set', our budgets must be coerced, not the other way around. Some have had the nerve to even discuss the possibility of 'taxing churches' for late special contributions! I think that is how all revolutions begin.

**17. We have burdened** our membership with special contribution goals and financial budgets that could be dramatically reduced if we did not waste so much, or stopped spending so lavishly on things we really don't need, and had much more accountability and input from non-paid staff.

**18. There is** a great inequity in the way we desire to take care of the needs of our Western leaders versus our counterparts in the third world. Our third world counterparts do not mirror our medical benefits, our salaries and social security, and our retirement packages in any way. Is there nothing we can do to rectify this imbalance? Where is the justice? Where is the equality? Where is the concern?

**19. Conformity** is not unity. Consider the example of John the Baptist and Jesus-one sang a dirge, one played the flute. One ate locusts and one drank wine. Between these two great 'contemporaries' there was not a hint at trying to get each other to conform. They both preached the same message: repent. Or consider the sharp dispute between Paul and Barnabas-there was no forced conformity, or even between an inspired apostle and one

who was not, Apollos. Nor was conformity urged between Jews and Gentiles, or even apostles and apostles. We on the other hand have forced conformity upon ourselves, and then bragged to the world that we are united in mind and spirit. True unity is utterly based on freedom. It is based on relationships steeped in love and mutual respect, not on rules or pulling rank.

True, sincere and biblical unity is accomplished by prayer (John 17) humility and personal surrender (Ephesians 4), by not going beyond what is written or taking pride in one man against another (1 Corinthians 4), and by the fear of God-it is a command. It is no doubt harder to achieve, but it is genuine, and not manufactured or coerced. True unity exalts in our God-given differences and is proven when differences of opinion and leadership styles do not keep us from fellowship-that is the only kind of unity that 'lets the world know we are disciples.' Enforced conformity always breeds rebellion, plain and simple. And the longer we have lived, the more we should understand this.

**20. The concept** of discipleship partners as presently practiced in most of our churches has failed. Perhaps more than all else, our discipleship hierarchy with all its 'little leaders' has caused more damage, heartache, and criticism than any other thing. Among the tens of thousands of untrained and 'unspiritual' disciples, advice has become permission, opinions have become orders, and the dignity and 'right' of our God given freedom has been denied. The nature of our hierarchy and the 'baptism is best' theology, when mixed with our sinful human nature has in many cases been a disaster. Paul said, 'I am free and belong to no man' and to the Corinthians, 'You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men' This is a command of God, not good advice. And to the Galatians, 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened *again* by a yoke of slavery'

In our discipling relationships, we can warn, plead, share from experience, and of course, open the Scriptures – but in the end, each Christian must work out their 'own salvation with fear and trembling'. Intrusive interference in matters of opinion is simply unacceptable. Pulling rank is a sin. A godly man will seek advice, but another godly man will never bind advice. Of course, some will fall and make bad decisions-and in some cases disastrous decisions-*but they are their* decisions, not ours. We routinely make ourselves the judges of another man's freedom; another man's life. But who are we to judge? The Ethiopian breaks every rule of discipleship we have. He was left dripping wet, and Philip was immediately taken away. Are we wiser than God? Or more competent than the Spirit of God?

We started out with good intentions, but systemic evils corrupt everything they touch. What started out as a sincere desire to protect the sheep has degenerated into a mechanism of control. There can be no doubt about this. The need for imposed discipleship relationships to maintain our system of things is so crucial that to say 'no thank you' has meant banishment from some of our churches. Kips own quote from LA is now world famous. That is why a sincere Christian would even think to ask, 'Is it a sin not to have a discipleship partner?' Well, is it?

Much of the advice that has been give over the years, some of it horrific, is merely a reflection of the selfish goals or 'higher agendas' of those 'over' them in the Lord. Or the belief that Christians are generally incapable or incompetent of pleasing God without another mans interference. ! No matter how much we spin it or try to deny it, this is what

the vast majority of our Christians believe and practice, because that is what they perceive to be reality.

But what do the Scriptures say? God will 'move them to follow my decrees'. We are a 'royal priesthood', are 'full of goodness' and 'competent to counsel one another', are 'sensible people' who must 'judge for yourselves' and can 'test those who claim to be apostles but are not' and who will one day 'judge the world' and 'the angels' Even 'men of little account' in the church could settle major disputes between believers. We are kings and priests and sons of God, we do not have to *depend* on any man at all. We are filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and possess the Word of God. We have a Great High Priest, a Mediator and an Advocate with the Father.

I do not deny the phenomenal amount of good that has come about from godly 'discipling' relationships- but as a formalized, authority laden institution it is doomed to fail and must therefore be dismantled. Why? 'Because where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom'

**21.The Pax Americana** must end

**22.By and large**, we have protected the shepherd and not the sheep. I understand the need for loyalty. Men have done me favors, bailed me out, given me second chances, lifted me up when I was down etc. But I am not talking about one's personal sins or family challenges (although these can be serious), rather, I am talking about protecting and keeping in leaders who are damaging, autocratic, brutal, oppressive, humiliating, selfishly ambitious, defensive and proud. Or about merely moving them to another congregation as a 'second chance', without any true repentance before hand. This is unacceptable. Unfortunately, to a large degree, the elder's role has become one of PR and protecting the evangelist more than anything else.

The New Testament portrays all kinds of leaders, some good and some bad. Not all must be categorically defended. In fact, several were publicly named and denounced. Blind support is unbiblical. Within the context of apostolic Christianity, within and among the 'one true church', were many anti-Christ's, Diotropheses', Hymanaeus', 'super apostles', errant apostles, false apostles, legalists, Judaizers, some Pharisees, and a 'great many' false teachers on the horizon. Those were the men who moved within the circles of fellowship within the first century. Can it not be true of our fellowship as well? Should we also not be on guard against ravenous wolves who will rise up from 'among your own selves'?

**23.By and large**, we fear men more than we fear God; we seek to please men, more than we seek to please God. What is the proof? Ask yourself how is it that so many sins and, dare I say, it cult-like practices have been allowed to prevail for so long over the reason and consciences of good men and women? I know what you say in secret, on the telephone, with a close friend, with your wife and in your heart. You have the same concerns I do but why have we not spoken up until now? Or why did we not push through? The fear of men.

**24.Whatever we crystallize**, formalize or institutionalize, that cannot be unequivocally defended by the Bible, will always be open to criticism and debate from men of good conscience- whether that be expedient titles and offices of authority, or our methods or theologies or cultural norms or whatever. This must never be stopped, but encouraged. We must fight for our God given right, our mandate, to always be restoring-especially the restoration of our freedoms in Christ.

**25. By and large** our preaching is man oriented, works oriented, mission oriented, duty oriented and law oriented. A works oriented gospel is no gospel at all—a constant barrage of ‘got to, have to, should and must’ —are wearisome at best, grace killing at worst.

When the focus is on what we do for God more than what He has done for us, immaturity and insecurity always prevail. Is that really what we want? We are a wearied, distracted, guilt-ridden group of sheep in too many quarters. The joy and pleasure of spontaneous faith, and the inward responses to grace and love have been taken away. The sheer grace of the gospel, the good news of it all, has been drowned by this kind of preaching and teaching

We don’t have to admit this to ourselves; the evidence is all around us, in almost every ministry. And in large part, it is the by-product of having to keep pushing for results, for more and better numbers. But where is the nourishment? Where is the mystery? Where is the systematic theology and deep exposition of the Word? Or the call to inward holiness and praying in the Spirit? Where is the jaw-dropping wonder at the glory and majesty of God? The love of Christ? The fellowship of the Spirit?

The greatest commandment is not, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’ but to ‘love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength’. Evangelism is a command of God, and not men. It should be the by-product of knowing Christ and Him crucified, and our response and obedience to the love of God. But in many cases, we have abused this ‘great commission’ into a scheme for becoming great in ourselves, and in the end have hurt the faith of many.

Here are a few quotes from a recently resigned evangelist on his perspective of our fellowship, the ‘fruit’ of our preaching and theologies:

*‘We are a movement full of people with really unhealthy views about themselves, with a very unhealthy dependence on the views of others over God and a very oppressive system in place which offers no real relief.*

*Our church culture is dominated by the premise that people cannot be trusted. We spend ridiculous amounts of energy policing them, invading every area of their lives with extra biblical authority and pre formed convictions about their characters.*

*Activity is revered above all. To do is of greater value in the eyes of those whose opinions matter than to feel, think, weigh, debate, wrestle or any other mental process that would produce character.*

*Our people have so few options in reality; they can become numb, bitter or shallow. We accept numb, we reward shallow compliance and we punish bitterness without an eye to its antecedents.*

*The mission is supreme, even when man’s interpretation of how to accomplish that mission ends up damaging the very people the mission seeks to save.*

One critic of our churches expressed it like this, ‘What we see practiced in this movement is pushing, not leading. They are driving the sheep from behind. It is done by men using earthly wisdom to accomplish what they think are God’s goals’

**26. So many thousands** of men have been effectively emasculated by legalism and compliance to authoritarian leadership. Their dignity as men created in the image of God has been stifled. Their dreams and personal convictions and ‘wildness of heart’ have been doused. All Christians, including brothers, must learn submission of course- that is our glory - but the squelching of personal dreams, inner feelings and convictions has had a demoralizing effect across the board. More than several men have lost their manhood.

**27. How is it** that elders have the highest qualifications in terms of spirituality, integrity and experience but are ‘overseen’ themselves by those who do not have the same criteria or moral authority? Expedience? Or a lack of respect? One or the other.

**28. Why have** we lost so many good and loyal men? For the most part, conscience reasons and not sin. This begs the question we refuse to look at for fear of the consequences. One GSL, loved and respected around the world, recently resigned. Before his resignation he wrote these words in his private journal about his wife and children. I asked if I could share them. ‘Is it best for them, for me to be this conflicted in what I do for a living? What will I feel when they start to see the weaknesses that surround the movement and yet they have no need to acquiesce in order to protect a job? What do I TRULY, on the deepest level, want for their lives spiritually? Do I want them to be what I am? Do I want them to live what I live? Do they already know and feel how much I am disappointed in who I have become? What must I do to assure that I do not perpetuate the cultural shallowness with their lives?’

**30. We need teachers** who are prophetic as well as academic.

**31. Lets stop** having “official things” Why do we need them? They only strengthen our denominational status. You don’t ‘officially’ speak for me, or I for you. Jerusalem never ‘officially’ spoke for Antioch. The Gentiles never spoke ‘officially’ for the Jews. When we have official positions on anything, it strains trust and credibility. And again, in the kingdom, it is a violation of our freedom. In our modern cities, no one genuinely respects the credibility of an editor if there is only one newspaper – we need sides, argument, openness, debate and dialogue. The freedom to disagree and still remain best friends.

**32. Our practice** of wholesale pruning must stop. Of course, it might result in the praises of men (if that is what you are after) but also, surely, in the wrath of God. Destroy Gods temple and God will destroy you. Destroy Gods children and God will destroy your children. Think about it. The same fate will await all of us unless we repent of this wicked and warped product of misguided humanism.

London’s so called ‘Revival’ in the early 90’s- with 450- 500 men and women being pruned from the membership has deeply scarred or embittered hundreds of members to this day. To say nothing of all the souls that were ruined because of this folly. Whole families, dear friends, and not a few ‘smoldering wicks’ were torn apart and blown out because of this unintentional method of playing God. Who challenged this? Why did it happen? Why does it continue? May God have mercy on us.

**33. Unfortunately,** and I say this with a sad heart, but the reputation of several of our teachers has also been discredited to some extent. For two simple reasons: They have spoken Biblically about our abuses and systemic evils and theological concerns but have not been heeded. In that case, all of my arguments for the preservation of ‘our system’ by

unscrupulous men have been validated. Or two: They have chosen *not* to speak prophetically against heresy, systemic evils or leadership abuses, but have rather concerned themselves with less urgent academic issues. In that case they have been cowards.

**34. Jesus commanded** us not to have titles that separate brother from brother. All men are equal. But in our churches, some men really are more equal than others. We have allowed and even enjoyed titles such as these, 'Kingdom Mission Evangelist' 'Kingdom Teacher' 'World Sector Leader' 'World Sector Elder' 'Geographic Sector Leader'. All of them quite a bit more substantial than, 'Rabbi'. And a lot more embarrassing, too. Power does indeed corrupt and pride always comes before a fall. And a high gate always invites destruction. Even Peter called himself our 'brother', our 'servant' and 'fellow elder'. His apostleship was an office of service, not a title. Paul said, 'I am nothing'. But again, all of these things are the natural consequence of a hierarchy that has been corrupted by the pride of men and the deception of the devil. (1 Timothy 3)

**35. Many in** the full time ministry are now so damaged, so emotionally immature, so guilty, so insecure, so yielding and compliant, and even seared in their consciences, I am afraid it will take years for them to fully recover. Some of them, too, have effectively been emasculated, squashed. This is the cumulative damage from authoritarian, and not servant leadership. The healing can only begin when those 'above', without defensiveness or repercussion, urge openness and invite criticisms because of the damage resulting from being 'under' an authoritarian leader. Those 'above' must confess specifically of their abuses and selfish ambition. Even now in London, from some of our most pure hearted and loyal staff, the feelings of betrayal, of being used, of being forced to go against their consciences, is now being voiced.

**36. So many women** in the ministry are conflicted. They are not emotionally equipped for the kind of guilt and pressure that has been placed on their shoulders. God has not designed them for these kinds of burdens or strains. Unfortunately, our western model of the "total woman" has by and large been forced upon almost all of our women in the full time ministry, in almost every country and culture in the world. And yet, not one wife of an apostle or evangelist is even mentioned by name in the New Testament. It almost seems that the wives of the Apostles accompanied their husbands for the express purpose of working to support them financially 'Or is it only I and Barnabbas who must work for a living?' (1 Corinthians 9. 3-6) I am not saying I believe it should be this way, only that we have explored very few other New Testament paradigms for leadership. We have elevated our partnership with women in the gospel to the role of co-evangelist in many respects, and I am afraid this model has crushed several of them.

**37. Countless hundreds** of good hearted family group leaders and Bible talk leaders have stepped out of their roles because of discouragement and weariness. For the most part, we have not instilled in them a sense of faith and joy and moral obligation under God, and our leaders meeting are rarely about prayer and worship, but rather, about accountability, making the targets, and forced follow-ups. The result? Not a sincere love for the weak and lost, but feelings of guilt and frustration and shame. Others simply 'hate' discipleship groups. How many thousands more around the world do not want *any* form of leadership, including the full time ministry, because of what they have seen or experienced from those 'over' them in the Lord? One advantage of moving around so much and being in so many different ministries is a wider vantage point. We are in a crisis.

**38. The genius** of local of autonomy, and the many forms of local church government provided in the New Testament, must once again be explored and embraced. Local church autonomy is biblical. Our choice of a hierarchical system of government-with world wide 'control' of our churches as the goal- by necessity, needed to squash and undermine the principle of local autonomy- even if 'the word autonomy is not in the Bible' For whatever the reason, we have all just rolled over and played dead on this.

But an unbiased examination of the New Testament will surely confirm what I am saying. Co-operation yes, control no. Unity yes, uniformity no. Brotherhood yes, bullying no. Giving yes, extraction no. Biblical autonomy- or 'self government' – is a safe- guard against the uniform spread of heresy. It is a deterrent to the spread of systemic abuses. It is the first line of defense against the violation of our freedoms. It allows each church to be persuaded by truth rather than coerced by men. And it allows each church, in turn, to persuade others as well. There are no rulers in the kingdom. There are no pillar churches deciding and binding decisions on other congregations. In fact, autonomy is the only way to test the sincerity of our love and unity as a brotherhood.

**39. Different churches** will always be at different stages of maturity, and will have different needs. There seem to be several models of leadership structure and local church oversight in the Bible. God has not laid down a once for all, inviolable statement concerning these matters- only that Christ is King and Head and that we are all brothers. Offices and oversight are there. Authority in leadership cannot be denied. But structures and models of government seem to vary depending on need or circumstance or stage of maturity, but with the goal ultimately, to result in a plurality of overseers. However, one thing we do not find *anywhere* in Scripture is 'one church over another' Once a young congregation is on its feet, is filled with the Spirit and has 'commended' leaders- it must be set free, allowed to walk, run and even fall on its own (Revelation 2,3) When Paul said, 'Now I commit you to God and the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified', he did just that. He did not commit them to the oversight of a pillar church somewhere.

**40. The lack of centralized control** is clearly biblical, increasing our dependence on God, not man. The ways of the Spirit are mysterious and beyond the scope of man's wisdom. The surprising nature of God (Acts 9, Paul; Acts 10, Cornelius), the unplanned movements of men, the conversion of the Eunuch and sending him into the unknown, the supernatural unfolding of dramatic events, the attack on the church leading to the spread of the gospel, all came not from human control mechanisms but from God. A centralized body slows things down, and ultimately, puts out the Spirit's fire.

### **Now What?**

There is no easy way forward. The extraction of systemic evil will be painful and bloody – like Heb 4:12, applied movement-wide. We must resist the temptation to simply move forward, ignoring our past: dirty laundry must be exposed, and the disease identified and eradicated, or it will continue to spread throughout our fellowship. This is the nature of mildew (see Leviticus) and gangrene. Trying to change without acknowledging our past would be a huge mistake. This can be scary, but, like a root canal, it must be tackled thoroughly and extensively. The consequences – what it might mean for some of our leaders, or just how painful it might be – cannot be the deciding factor. We must do everything we can to heal, restore and rekindle our

badly damaged trust. Our priority must never be to preserve our jobs or the institution, but to protect the flock. We must be able to face and speak the truth – to ourselves and to each other – and to hear it from those who would confront us. Let us be emboldened by Peter’s relationship with Paul: the necessary but painful truth was spoken, but Peter harbored no grudges. Here are some of my suggestions and opinions from the things we are experiencing in London.

#### A: CLEANING THE CUP

1. Proceed with much prayer and fasting.
2. Invite openness and criticism, without defensiveness or repercussions. How you do this is an issue of much prayer and courage and caution. Clearly, the devil will try to use this time as well, to tear and to divide us.
3. Apply Matt 18 first, and allow the public forum for more widespread concerns. Caution against bitter words, which could cause serious damage in relationships. Choose as moderators, spiritual men who are commended by the members and perceived as unbiased. (Non-ministry).
4. Do not be surprised at what you hear, or from whom! The forums need to be open and honest, and allow for some venting; however, they must not become slanderous and out of control. If the Corinthian’s ‘open’ worship services did ‘more harm than good’, how much more an open forum where people are pouring out their hearts, often out of much pain and anger. Tread carefully here.
5. There must be public heartfelt confession by the elders and evangelists. Do not even think about doing this until you ‘get it’, or the Christians will be even more angry and disappointed, even cynical.
6. Leaders must be held accountable first, then the flock. We have had this reversed. Consider almost every example of discipline and judgment in the Bible. ‘Kill them all’ – starting at the temple. ‘Those who teach will be judged more strictly’. The leaders were the legalists, the Judaizers, the hypocrites, the face-slappers. To whom much has been entrusted, much will be expected.
7. Some leaders must have the integrity to step aside and re-earn the trust of the members, to be truly commended again. We must not think we are indispensable: 250 of Israel’s top leaders were struck down in one blow. (Num 16:35)
8. Practice Matt 5, leave your gift at the altar, and seek out those you have hurt – do not wait for someone to have to ‘prove their case’ against you first. Be completely humble and gentle.
9. Apologize specifically, in private and in public, as much as necessary
10. Do away with monthly stat taking as a form of motivation. Let things ‘slow down’ for a while, as God is working deeply in the hearts of all to be purified and reconciled. Teach LOVE for the lost, and moral obligation before God not man. When was the last time you, as a leader, shed tears for the lost, or desired that God would save them in exchange for your own salvation? This kind of love is not fostered by our obsessions with stat keeping and goal setting, but by prayer and through the Spirit. (Romans 8 and 9)
11. We must dismantle authoritarian DP relationships. All of these ‘little leaders’ have not been immune from bad theology. There should be more prayer, more love, more seeking of God’s will. All Christians should be encouraged to seek advice and examine the Scriptures, yet liberated to choose a course of action or application according to their own conscience.
12. We must deeply re-examine the nature of the gospel of God’s grace. (Starting with Galatians?)

13. If anyone suffers unjust repercussions for being open and / or expressing their hurt or anger, let God judge the oppressive leader

## B. FILLING THE CUP

Once the house is exorcised and swept clean, and the inside of the cup is washed, let us quickly refill it – with love, grace, liberty and the fear of God. Let us be motivated by the Cross- with all of its blessings AND obligations.

1. Christ must be overwhelmingly central in our preaching, teaching and counseling. This seems obvious, but is hardly practiced. Perhaps this would have prevented many of our problems to begin with. (Meditate on this one text to understand this point, 1 Corinthians 1).
2. Let our worship services, first and foremost, be about worship.
3. We must lead with love, grace and humility. Then we can preach powerfully on sin, righteousness and the judgment to come.
4. We must be on guard, lest rules, legalism and the traditions of men creep back in.
5. In our preaching, let us speak to the hunger of the Christians, meeting their needs, not our agendas.
6. Let us restore autonomy to the churches, and with it, true unity, allowing leaders to meet the needs of their local Christians, and to exercise the gifts and talents of the ‘royal priesthood’ of all believers.
7. Let us welcome and aggressively involve, *by the commendation of the church*, non-paid staff to be involved in the decision- making processes that affect all aspects of church life. Men who are full of the Holy Spirit and faith. (Acts 6)
8. We must train our children to be independent thinkers, and even, when necessary, to have an ‘independent’ spirit. Paul said there must be differences among you to show who is right, who is from God. Personally, I want my children to question everything that is taught them, respecting men of course, but fearing and following God.
9. The need of the hour is for strong and courageous leadership, but more importantly, for righteousness and humble leadership. We do not need more autocrats and lords, but men and women who lead from brokenness before God, and who are truly, in every sense of the word, ‘servant leaders’
10. Let us humble ourselves collectively before God and see if he will not open the floodgates of heaven until there is no more room...

## **The glory and cost of freedom**

### *The glory of freedom*

Surrender and submission will be real not coerced  
True love for God is explored and worked out  
The spread of missions is more spontaneous and rapid  
The sincerity of our love is tested  
We are encouraged to be lovers of the truth  
Devotion is from the heart  
We learn to accept the weak

The joy from pure motives  
True unity, not conformity  
Inoculation against forced heresy  
Giving is from love and faith  
Giving is not reluctant or from compulsion  
The only way to truly mature  
Our differences are cause for wonder  
Sharp disputes are allowed  
To show who is truly from God  
True spiritual maturity is fostered  
God's individual will is more effectively accomplished  
Teachers are made more accountable  
The struggle for truth makes us stronger  
We follow up on the weak from love and compassion  
True passion for the lost  
Slaves to none  
Slaves to all  
We will disciple the heart and motives and not outward appearances

*The cost of freedom is*

Bad decisions will be made.  
Entire churches will leave.  
Heresy will arise  
Anti Christ's will arise  
The doctrine of demons will infiltrate  
Tares will grow with the wheat  
Entire households will be destroyed  
Another Corinthian church will be in our fellowship...

But in the end, free will, voluntary submission and love are the only thing that can stand blameless and unashamed at the final coming of God.

**A final thought from Cecil Hook, an exultra conservative mainline 'church of Christ' minister:**

### **THE FREEFLOWING STREAM**

'In finding its medial course a stream may wash from bank to bank. Although it receives pollutants constantly, the flowing stream tends to purify itself. Dam it up, and it stagnates and breeds all sorts of scum and slime. The free-flowing stream is in a constant purifying process even though it is never pure in the strictest sense.

So it is with the church. The free, autonomous disciples must be permitted to go unrestricted by earthly rulers. Free people may vary in interpretation and understanding in different congregations and in different generations. The church may go from one extreme to the other as it seeks constantly to correct its course. The church will have constant danger of impurities, so it will always be in a state of reformation, but because it is composed of erring humans, it will never be without flaw entirely. One generation cannot crystallize and credalize a system in

order to guarantee that its concepts will be bound on the next generation to insure its faithfulness. Efforts to control the next generation are attempts to force unity by conformity. When the stream is dammed up, it becomes stagnant and begins to depend upon intellectual inbreeding, which produces doctrinal monstrosities.'

A Personal Letter From Marilyn:

Many of you might wonder where I stand in all of this. I am in full agreement with the paper Henry has written, and I helped him edit the first drafts. These are issues that we have been discussing with each other for years. By temperament, and perhaps because of my woman's perspective, my attitude over the years has been less to confront, and more to trust that, over time, 'God will work things out'. I have always believed that we are God's people, and that God would not let us totally go off the rails. I have always believed that there are good-hearted men and women among us, who will fight for righteousness, and repent as God shows us our sin.

I have seen and heard things which shocked and saddened me, and I have not spoken up. I have tried to live and lead righteously in my little corner of the kingdom, hoping that most of us were trying to do the same thing. Now, however, in light of the pain, hurt, and anger that are being exposed and expressed in London, I'm convinced it's time to stop living in ostrich-mode, and SPEAK OUT. I am fully aware of the risk this involves, but to *not* speak would be the gravest sin. I believe that God has put these burdens on Henry's heart, and I am proud of the spiritual effort and energy that Henry has put into writing this paper. I have seen, up close, his anguish and sorrow as he has wrestled with the Scriptures and with his relationship to and within the church that he loves so much. These things need to be said, and I pray that many will listen, and add their own voice to the discussion that needs to precede radical change. MK