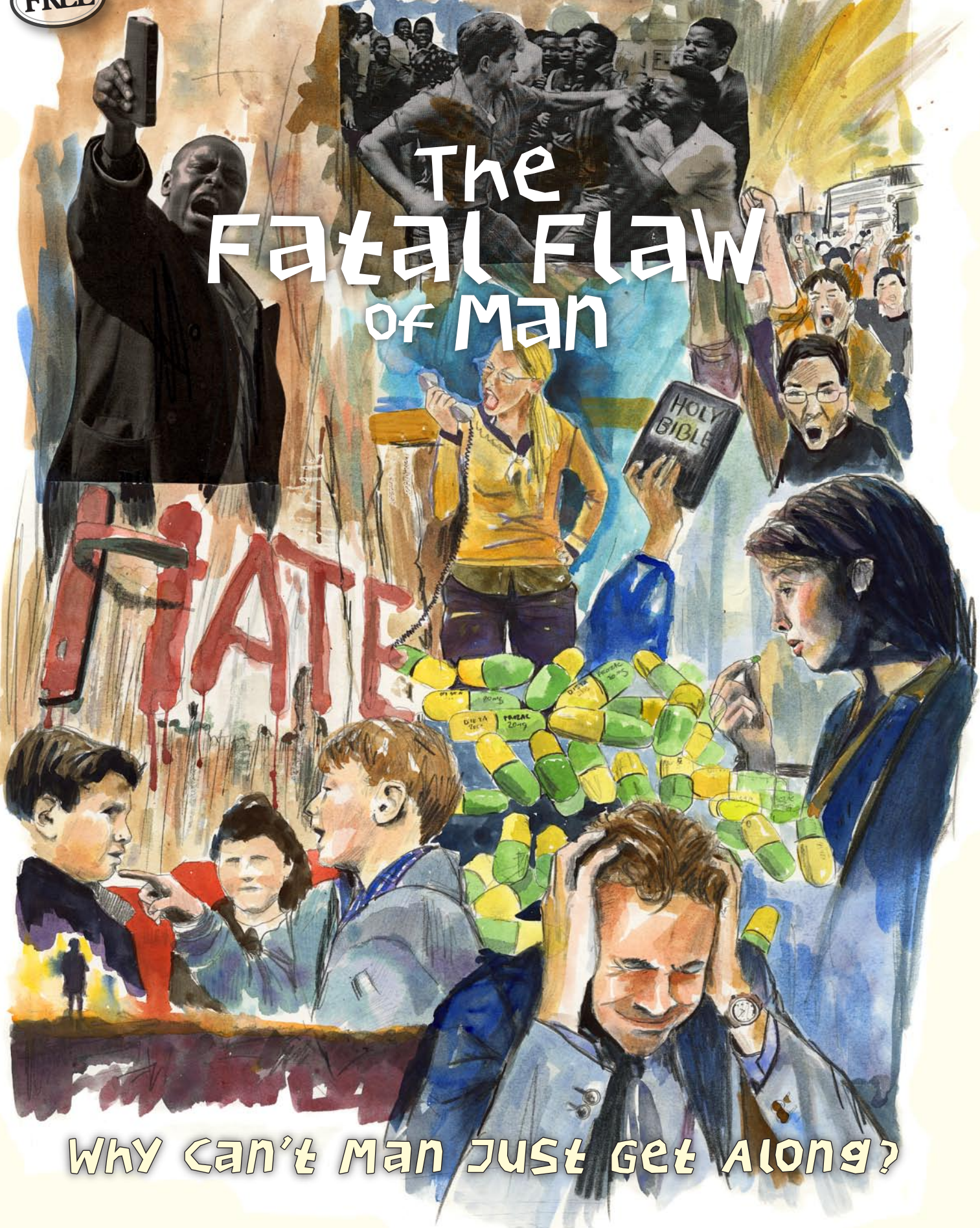


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The Fatal Flaw of Man



Why Can't Man Just Get Along?



The Fatal Flaw Of Man:

Why Can't Man Just Get Along?

From the big box retail stores in suburbia to the new mega-churches that are beginning to dot the American landscape, from the barroom to the ballroom, from sea to shining sea, regardless of race, color, age, national origin, gender, religion, disability or sexual orientation, everyone is riddled with one common flaw — *they simply can't get along.*

Say what you want, mankind is fatally flawed. Regardless of the complex legal notices that appear in the waiting rooms of employers, immense affirmative-action litigation, silky words by politicians, and clever excuses by the religious clergy, division still reigns as the champion over the race of man. So why can't people get along?

Though a great deal of energy and thought has been given to passing legislation that will curb people's natural tendencies to discriminate, it doesn't deal with the root of the problem. You might smile and greet someone at the workplace, while inwardly scowling at him. This kind of repressive behavioral control doesn't help people get along; in fact, it causes them to despise each other for the restraint of external control. In reality, repressing their true feelings about others is a way of life.

How about at church? Are Christians any different from the rest of the disunited world? Is their savior, Jesus Christ, giving them the power to overcome the fatal flaw that causes disunity so they can be a light to the world? Talk to most Christians today about unity, and you will hear some very abstract concepts. Christianity today boasts some 37,000 denominations worldwide.¹ So, with this kind of fragmentation, one can only be left with two options: either Jesus Christ

does not have the power to cause His followers to live together in peace and unity, or Christians today are not really following Him.

The famous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said to Christians, "You will have to look more redeemed if I am to believe in your redeemer." He could not reconcile the message that Christians preached about love, forgiveness, unity, and oneness with the obvious quarrels, inquisitions, and Crusades that had stained her 1,900 years' history as a religion. When looking into the reflecting pool of recorded Christian history, man's fatal flaw glares back at you.

Though many will make excuses as to why Christ's followers can't get along, the true gospel puts an end to all divisions — it doesn't excuse or perpetuate them. Oddly enough, despite the apparent disunity among Christians, unity was supposed to be the hallmark of disciples of the Son of God. Look at the following passages from the Gospel according to John:

"That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." (John 17:21-23)

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

¹ "When Jesus said, 'Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,' did he intend that the people called to bear his name in the world would eventually be divided into 37,000 competing denominations? That is the number of separate Christian bodies worldwide, according to missions statistician Todd Johnson of the World Christian Database." Timothy George, "Is Christ Divided?," *Christianity Today*, July, 2005.

Also, recorded in the Book of Acts, the early believers were fulfilling what the Messiah had taught and prayed:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 2:42-45; 4:32-35)

If Nietzsche and other critics could have seen this manifestation among believers, then they wouldn’t have had such scorn. Sadly, though, these verses did not describe the state of affairs among Christians in their day, nor do they today. In fact, today, all men can tell who *aren’t* His disciples because of their inability to come together and love one another.

The true gospel is the only solution to the most devastating problem in human history — *disunity*. In fact, it calls a person out of the fatally flawed world where division and strife reign and into a new life where love and unity reign. It is in this new culture that believers do not settle for “agreeing to disagree,” but they *actually* agree because they love one another.²

Can the Father and Son Agree?

It is silly to think that the Father and the Son are in continual disagreement, dividing over doctrine, but what is one to think about the prayer that Christ prayed? “Father, let them be one, just as you and I are one.” Either this was an unreasonable prayer, demanding something of His followers that was impossible, thus making Christ a hard taskmaster, or perhaps those who are claiming to be His followers aren’t really following Him. If you are a follower of someone, then you say and do what he says and does. Is Christianity today saying and doing what Christ commanded?

Today, Christianity boasts some 37,000 denominations worldwide. So, with this kind of fragmentation, one can only be left with two options: either Jesus Christ does not have the power to cause His followers to live together in peace and unity, or Christians today are not really following Him.

In Matthew 24:14, Christ said that the gospel of the Kingdom would be preached as a *witness* to all the nations, and then the end would come. What kind of witness was He talking about? A witness bears testimony to the truth.³ So what is the truth? Well,

according to John 17:21-23, the truth was that the Father sent the Son because He loved the people of the world. So, by obeying His commands, His disciples would give witness to what He both said and did — they would prove that it was true, and be a light to the world around them. But what if they didn’t obey His commands? What if they weren’t able to overcome the fatal flaw that divides the whole world? What if they couldn’t get along and ended up dividing into an ever-increasing number of factions? Would they be any different or stand out more starkly than any other group, organization, or people? The answer is plainly, “No.” Christ’s followers, if unable to overcome the simple rifts



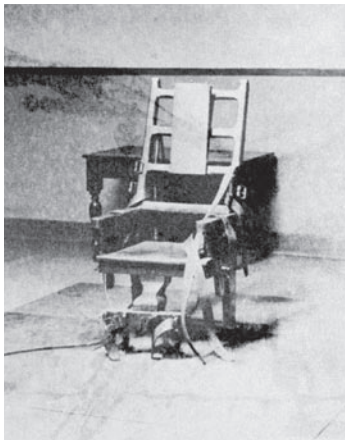
Try as he might, man cannot right the workings of the fatal flaw. Legislation of non-discrimination, equality, tolerance, and diversity have proven ineffective as a cure.



² 1 Corinthians 1:10 ³ Micah 7:20, Isaiah 49:6



The symbol of the cross, perched high atop many a church steeple, is a symbol of death, not life. It would be no different from someone putting an electric chair atop their place of worship.



that plague people's relationships, could not prove that He rose from the dead. On the contrary, they would bear witness that He is still in the grave, which is precisely what Nietzsche and thousands of other critics down through the centuries have said. It may be easy to intellectualize away Christ's commandments, but the result that occurs is that the unbelieving world looks on and scoffs.

Even the symbol of the cross, perched high atop many a church steeple, engraved and printed on pulpits, books, T-shirts, and many Christians' automobiles, is a symbol of *death*, not life. It would be no different from someone putting an electric chair atop their place of worship, or a noose on their sacred text. Posting the cross everywhere is like again hanging the Son of God up to public shame.⁴ The true testimony to the Father sending the Son is not *how* He died, but *what* He experienced in death, and the fact that He *rose* from the dead, giving His disciples the power over their tendencies that cause death in human relationships. If His resurrection can't give people the power to overcome the fatal flaw in mankind, then what did it accomplish? We can all with one voice say, "He rose from the grave: SO WHAT?!" People celebrate His resurrection on Easter Sunday, but their actions the rest of the year show that, as far as they are concerned, He might as well still be dead.

No More Walls of Hostility

Somewhere there must be a place where the fatal flaw can be overcome. It can't just be in the "sweet bye-and-bye." The prophet Ezekiel wrote of such a place:

"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its

topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches." (Ezekiel 17:22-23)

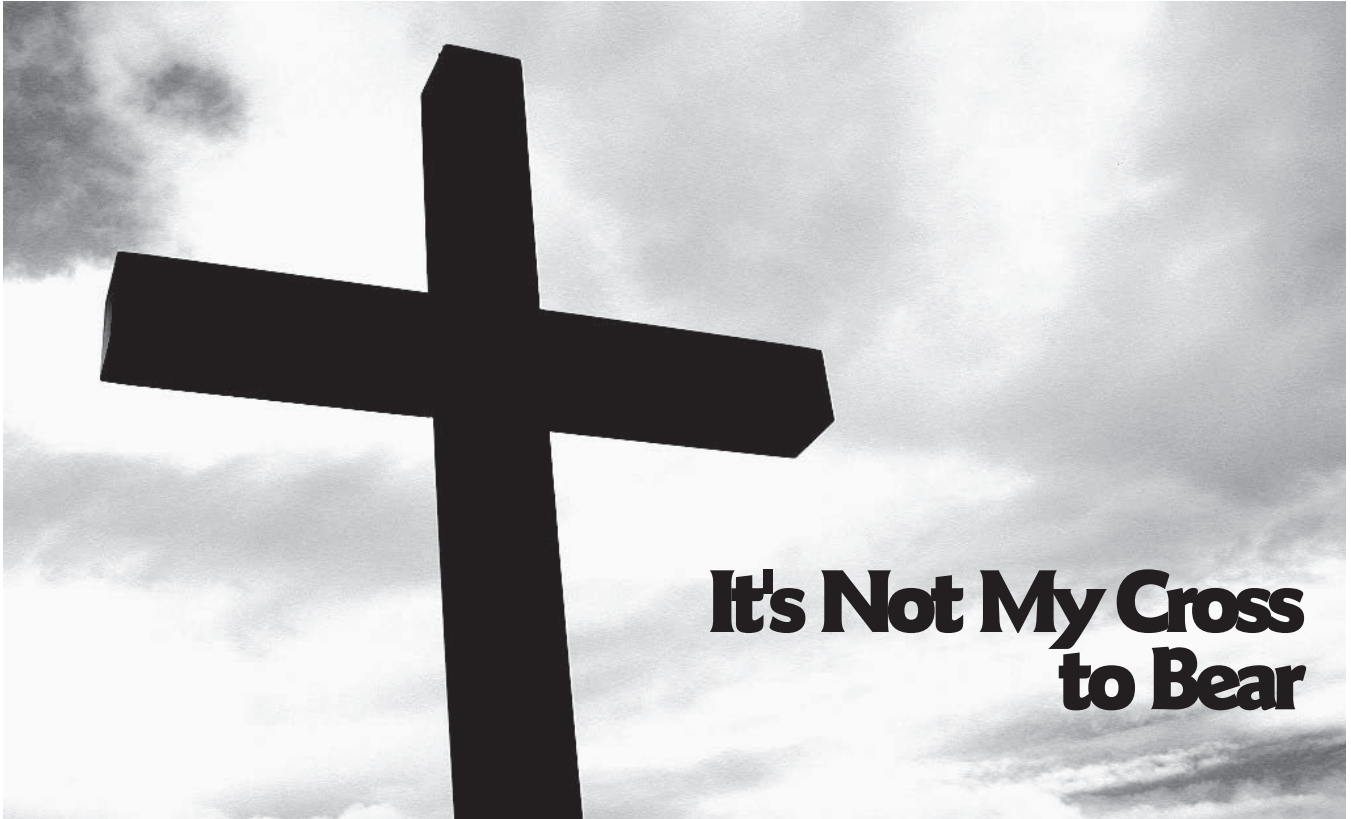
So where is this tree that spreads its branches to allow birds of every imaginable kind to find shelter? It is certainly speaking about a place where people from every background live together in peace and unity — a place where people are overcoming the division that has plagued humanity since its inception. Does such a place exist?

If the gospel is being obeyed, it gives those who have received it the power to love one another. Love is what overcomes the fatal flaw. There is a place where the tree that Ezekiel wrote about is growing and collecting birds of

every feather. It is even prophesied in the New Testament that such a place will emerge in the latter days⁵ — a place where Christ's earnest prayer is being fulfilled, a place, as the Psalmist wrote, where brothers dwell together in unity.⁶ It is there, in that place, where God commands the blessing of eternal life. It is there that the fatal flaw is being overcome. If you are one of the weary ones, longing to be able to obey what is written in the Gospels, and tired of excuses as to why no one can live that way, we invite you to come and see the solution in action. 🐦



⁴ Hebrews 6:6 ⁵ Revelation 5:9 is a real place where the gospel has the power over the fatal flaw, if you don't skirt around it. ⁶ Psalm 133:1-3



It's Not My Cross to Bear

By the time I reached my early 20s, I'd had enough of the constant, agonizing struggle deep inside my soul. That struggle was about the things that always seemed to mess up my relationships with others. I couldn't explain it, nor could I figure it out — it was just always there. This struggle had been going on ever since I could remember. But I didn't want to remember. I wanted to forget. I was tired of trying to get it together in relationships. In fact, I was to the point where I was tired of relationships with people, period! I never dreamed that the root of the problem came from a fatal flaw *in me*.

I seemed to have lots of friends, but never thought they really liked me as much as they let on. Since childhood, I had always had the sense that there was something wrong inside me, but I couldn't explain what it was. I was afraid to try. I just knew there were things about me that I didn't like. I went off to college trying to hide those things. No one had any answers, so we all

just pretended to have it together.

In 1969, I finally decided I'd had enough of living a "plastic life." I took some hope in expanding my consciousness to find the answer to why I couldn't love as I wanted to love, and why I always ended up divided from people, either outwardly or subtly inside. I was tripping one time in Knoxville with some people who seemed to have it together, a crowd I wanted to be a part of. We were all trying to be real, looking for answers, and openly talking about our struggle. We thought the psychedelic experience would get us past our "hang-ups" and set us free. At one point, a girl looked me right in the eye and said, "You're just afraid to be real, man. You've got to be honest

with yourself about what's going on inside of you!" The thought terrified me. I didn't even know how or where to start. I think she was reaching out to me, but all I felt was rejection.

Later on that year, I understood something that was undeniable. I was selfish to the core, and I was powerless to change. It made me mad and very, very frustrated inside! The hard part was that those selfish ways were a deeply woven part of the fabric of my character, of who I was. Even though I didn't know how to define it at the time, the thought that I couldn't change those ways in me made me very hopeless that I could ever be a person who could truly love others. This was devastating to me because I really believed that if

Fatal flaw — a way of relating to others and to yourself that is divided and conflicted within your soul. From its root come all kinds of behavior that divides you from others, slowly kills your soul, and eventually ends in death. It comes out when you are stimulated by spirits in circumstances that are a familiar routine of your daily life... The feelings as well as the deeds themselves are very shameful to the one trapped by them, and very painful to expose to another person. The fatal flaw has a way of continually deceiving a person so that he cannot see or sense that flaw working inside his soul.



It's Not My Cross to Bear The Allman Brothers Band

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

*I have not come, yeah, to testify,
About our bad, bad misfortune,
And I ain't here a wonderin' why.*

*But I'll live on, and I'll be strong,
Cause it just ain't my cross to bear.*

*I sat down, and wrote you a long letter,
Was just the other day,
Said as sure as the sun rise, baby,
Tomorrow I'll be up and on my way.*

*But I'll live on, and I'll be strong,
Cause it just ain't my cross to bear.*

Oh, no.

*Oh, but I'll live on, and I'll be strong,
Cause it just ain't my cross to bear,
Yes, now baby.*

*But in the end baby,
Long towards the end of your road.
Don't reach out for me, baby,
Cause I'm not gonna carry your load.*

*But I'll live on, and I'll be strong,
Cause it just ain't my cross to bear.*

Yeah, yeah.

Find someone else baby.

Yeah, yeah...

human beings could truly love, they could change the world.

One summer, a few years, and many heartaches later, I lived with some friends in a college town in Tennessee. I had dropped out — no job, disillusioned, living on the edge. I knew the stuff that created the turmoil was actually inside of me, but it was easier to blame it all on the “Establishment,” or the war, or my daddy, or religion, or even God. I didn’t want to admit that I didn’t trust women, and at the same time took advantage of them, or

that I was unfaithful and treacherous, much less insecure, or that my own selfish motives were what always messed things up. I don’t really know to what degree these things back then dawned on me, but when they did, I quickly pushed them aside,

for it was too painful to go there.

There were never answers and the nagging questions never went away. Occasionally, I could come up with a great plan about how it could be with some new girlfriend, or get excited about traveling to a cool, faraway place. Still, I couldn’t see any real purpose for my life. All the opportunities seemed futile to me. One day that summer, I took a trip home to Chattanooga and found myself alone, not wanting to see anybody I knew. I didn’t want to meet anybody new either. I was just sick and tired of the struggle inside that always surfaced with people — pretty much anybody. I was alone. I loved it, and I hated it at the same time.

About this time, the Allman Brothers came out with their first album. A song on that album really gripped me. It was “It’s not my Cross to Bear.” It was a very deep blues tune that seemed to reach right to the core of where I was at. If you’ve ever heard that song when

struggling with the fatal flaw that’s a part of who you are inside, that wrecks your life, that’s too big for you to handle and too complicated to understand, then the song probably had a deep effect on you, too.

The first time I heard it, the words of the song jumped out of the stereo speakers and right into my soul. The title gripped me the most. I knew that Greg Allman grew up in the “buckle” of the Bible Belt. Even the song title “It’s not my Cross to Bear” was a bold statement

At one point, a girl looked me right in the eye and said, “You’re just afraid to be real, man. You’ve got to be honest with yourself about what’s going on inside of you!” The thought terrified me.

against Bible-Belt Christianity, to say the least. I thought to myself that finally someone had enough guts to say it. The Christian message of the cross never gave anyone I knew the power to carry his own cross and conquer the fatal

flaw within him, no matter how many times he asked Jesus into his heart.

I never found a remedy to the flaw that forever divides and crushes relationships, that keeps a person from loving in a way that bonds his heart together with others, and gives them the power to live together in unity. So, why should we shoulder the guilt of a heavy cross we cannot bear, when there are no real answers? Greg Allman raised a banner for all the world to see. To me it was an anthem against an unjust God portrayed by a powerless religion. Nobody understands this better than people raised in the South.

The words of the song brought the message home to me loud and clear. No longer did I have to “testify” about my “bad, bad misfortunes,” feeling bad about myself, or blaming others, nor did I even have to sit around “wonderin’ why” relationships went sour. I could just “live on” and “be strong...

It's Not My Cross to Bear

cause it just ain't my cross to bear." I felt justified to just get up and go when things got hard and painful... even when I hurt others, because I couldn't change and if whoever made me this way didn't have an answer, then "it just ain't my cross to bear" came easily as *my answer*. I'm not responsible so I'm not going to feel bad about it any longer!!

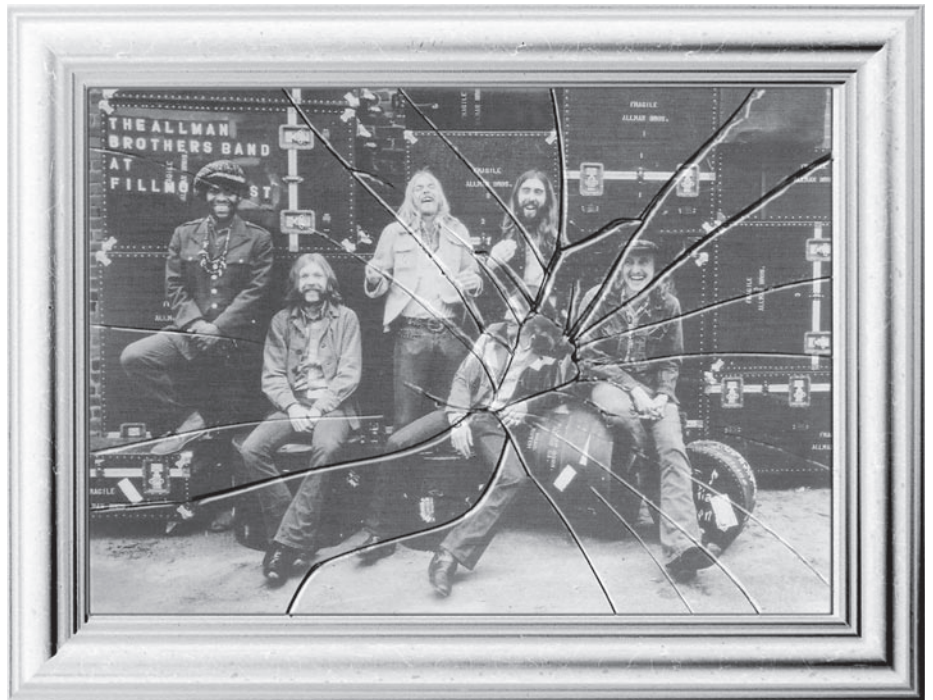
The song communicated to me that Jesus couldn't fix the selfish ways I hurt people, nor could he heal the damage from being hurt by others. The last verse shoved the door wide open for me to shake off the bonds of the struggle inside and suppress it so far down into my soul that I would never hear it again: "In the end, baby, long towards the end of your road, don't reach out for me, baby, cause I'm not gonna carry your load. But I'll live on and I'll be strong, cause it just ain't my cross to bear..."

This song became an anthem to me, a way of life, an excuse to justify my selfish, hurtful ways. It took away all personal accountability, or so I thought. I could finally live life on my terms, and ignore the struggle inside, and just get the most I could get for myself.

This way of thinking was a strong narcotic for me. It justified my hopeless feelings and gave me an excuse not to deal with the struggle inside anymore. It seemed to take away the pain for short periods of time, and it sure fit well with a life filled with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. So I lived on and made myself so strong and so hard that when it came time to marry the woman that I really loved, really needed, and wanted to be with forever, all I could say to her concerning the vows was, "Vows? I can't make vows. Nothing is forever!"

We got married anyway, but her trust in me could never be recovered. I have regretted that statement all the days of my life since then. How could a man be so proud and disconnected from his heart?

My fatal flaw finally destroyed my soul enough and broke my strength enough that I became increasingly



The Fatal Flaw is hard at work, not even sparing the most famous and successful music acts. As The Allman Brothers' bio reads: "The story of the Allman Brothers Band is one of triumph, tragedy, redemption, dissolution, and a new redemption. Over nearly 40 years, they've gone from being America's single most influential band to a group that nearly disintegrated, then to reach the 21st century rejuvenated as one of the most respected rock acts of their era." [Most of the original members have left the band or died.]

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desperate and needy. I ran into a group of people who were different. They had a quality about them that I did not have. They were warm, and they got along with each other. What really shocked me was their willingness to introduce me to the source of that life and make me a part of it. I asked them, "How did you get to be the way you are?" I didn't want doctrines or philosophies; I just wanted the life they had. They told me that to get the life they had, I needed to surrender my life completely, give it up, and die to all my dreams and ambitions, and admit the fatal flaw that was destroying me. They told me that the life they had was the Spirit of Yahshua,¹ whose very essence is love. I could sense their love for me. It made me believe that maybe God loved me, too. It gave me hope.

They opened my eyes to the fact that Yahshua was willing to bear the

¹ *Yahshua* is the original Hebrew name of Jesus. See *The Name Above All Names* on page 47 for an in-depth explanation of that name.

It's Not My Cross to Bear

cross for the pain and devastation that my fatal flaw had caused in me and in countless people who had crossed my path. They let me know that if I called on His name with all my heart, and was baptized into the reality of His death, He would hear me and forgive me, and He would pour that love into me and make me a new person inside. I am so, so thankful that when He looked at me and all my shameful, selfish ways, He did not say, "It's not my cross to bear." He actually took my guilt, and became my fatal flaw, and let those selfish ways in me take Him to death² in my place. Love like this was overwhelming.

Hope welled up inside me. With all my heart, I wanted to have that love. No price was too great. I was willing to do anything to have the life these people had. I wanted to be like them and like their Yahshua. I surrendered. I was saved from the lethal power of the fatal flaw that had divided me and wrecked havoc all the days of my life. Now I had the power of a love that was real and could overcome all those selfish ways in me.

But that's not the end of the story!

I didn't just live happily ever after. For 32 years now, I have lived together with those new friends in a common life of sharing. The everyday circumstances of our life bring out the effects of the remnants of that fatal flaw in my personality. Since that first day when I walked into that community at the Vine House in Chattanooga in 1974, I have gradually seen how I react to things that are uncomfortable for me, or that require something of me that I am reluctant to give. My initial tendency is to get mad or frustrated, and then get forceful and hard with the other person, or to withdraw and avoid contact altogether.

Living together the way we do in community, I can't get away with this behavior for long. Instead, I have had friends who have enough love to be

honest and at the same time to forbear with me, showing extreme patience. They never let me give up on myself, and they always encourage me. We all live this way with one another. This is the reason the fatal flaw of fallen man does not divide us. We are learning to be humble in the face of the effects of this flaw in our lives, and to turn to one another. His love in the hearts of our brothers and sisters heals us.

It takes a long time for love to penetrate the hard shell of the fatal flaw and get to its roots embedded deep in our soul. There are a lot of

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excuses, blaming others and getting offended, that are integral parts to the fatal flaw in all of us. The real, convincing testimony to the world that Yahshua is real is the love that His disciples have for one another.³ This love breaks through all those ways that divide us, and reaches down to the root and starts healing us in our soul, deep inside. This love and healing bonds our hearts together in an undeniable and visible unity. When the world around us sees that love and unity, the people will know that God sent His Son to save them from their fatal flaw, and that He loves them the same way that He loves His Son and His people.⁴

There must be a therapeutic healing environment for all this to take place. That environment is the common life together in community that this love always creates. We all have a need for God's love to reach

us. That's why we must live together daily, so it can reach deep enough to heal us. It's not enough to merely die and go to heaven someday. That mentality doesn't change anything or anybody. We must be a people that are transformed from the inside out to actually love as He loved. The world must see a demonstration of this in order to have a basis for hope. And a just God needs this demonstration to be seen by the whole world as a light to them, to give all men and women everywhere the chance to be saved, really saved. This demonstration that proves God's love for mankind, that justifies Him in a sick and dying world that just can't get along, is what will usher in a new age where this love will rule supreme.⁵

I still see the remnants of that fatal flaw in me every day. I'm learning to bear the cross of admitting it and humbling myself. It's encouraging. The ways it comes out of me are not so strong now. My fatal flaw is losing its grip on my soul. I'm learning how to love as my Savior, Yahshua, when I judge that flaw rising up inside, and surrender to the truth that this way *is* in me. God's love in my brothers and sisters makes me secure enough to do this, to know I won't be rejected or cast out. Then God helps me. His love comes to me faithfully, every day, usually through my brothers and sisters who live with me every day, and who have this special love that only comes from God poured out in their hearts. That love is the only thing that is healing my fatal flaw all the way down to the root.

Ed Wiseman



² Not merely dying, but descending into *Sheol*, the realm of death, a place of torment (Luke 16:28) where the disembodied souls of those who have died must pay the wages of their sins, facing their guilt for the ways they ignored the voice of their conscience, and taking responsibility for the damage inflicted upon others by their words and deeds. It was not only on the cross, but even more so in death that Yahshua suffered in our place. ³ John 13:34,35

⁴ John 17:21-23 ⁵ Matthew 24:14

Homecoming

The atmosphere was alive with expectation as we gathered in the big hall. Actually, it was a basketball court converted into a banquet hall. We were renting it for our homecoming. Our church had been planning this for quite a while.

It was a hot summer day, and I was sweating in my three-piece suit and tie. Everyone was in high spirits, and there was much moving about, laughing, and joking, as we all joined in to make the final preparations.

In the kitchen, several women were preparing all kinds of tantalizing dishes, and lots of them. I continually made excuses to look for this, that, or the other in the kitchen, so that I could feast my eyes on all the delicacies. For festivity and eating, there is nothing like a homecoming celebration at a black church.

We had invited the pastor and choir from another church to join us for the celebration. They arrived in all their finery. The pastor and deacon of our church greeted them and showed the choir where they could don their robes.

The entire hall was filled with the overpowering scent of so many women splashed with their favorite perfume, and men with their favorite aftershave. It didn't mix particularly well with the smell of fried chicken, greens, potato salad, and a hundred other things that tempt the palate.

I went outside several times to see whether my friends were coming. I had invited them a week before, and they had assured me that they would be there. It was almost time to start, and they hadn't arrived yet. Just as I



turned to go back into the building, a truck pulled to the curb and stopped. It was larger than a pickup truck, and had wooden siding along the bed.

When I saw the truck, I was delighted. The back was packed full of wonderful, enthusiastic people. My friends had arrived! Waving to me, as they scrambled off the truck, they seemed to be the happiest people in the world. They hugged me and patted me on the back as we greeted one another.

Opening the door to the hall, I urged them to go right in, because things were about to start. When they filed in, one after the other, they made quite an impression on all present. Most of the talk in the hall stopped, and people stared.

You see, my friends were mostly wearing cut-off jeans, overalls, and denim skirts. Their hair was longer than is usual in Christian circles — and they were white. As soon as they came through the door, they fanned out into the hall to greet everybody there. We didn't know what hit us. Their smiles, enthusiasm, and warmth were overwhelming.

I was ecstatic, because the members of my church could finally meet these people I had been telling them about. I was totally oblivious

to the reactions of many of these members. These new guests were something completely unexpected.

The program finally got underway, with the pastors and others saying the things that people usually say at homecomings. Then the visiting choir wound things up with a few lively selections. I had the impression that

things were somewhat dampened, but I couldn't imagine why that would be.

The food was served, and there was much animated conversation. Most of it came from my friends as they talked with me and others of our congregation. After the meal they did something extraordinary. They all stood at their tables and began singing a song of appreciation to us. It was beautiful.

As the day wound down, my friends had to leave. There were warm good-byes and hugs for everybody. When the last person was on the truck, I stood and waved until they were out of sight.

When I re-entered the building, the pastor and deacons were waiting for me. They asked whether they could have a "word" with me in one of the more private rooms of the building. I followed them to the room, not suspecting that anything was wrong. When I closed the door behind me, I found myself facing three rather perturbed men.

"Why did you invite all those white hippies to our homecoming?!" snapped one deacon. The other deacon followed with, "And they didn't even have enough respect for the pastors to wear a suit and tie!"

Homecoming

I looked from one to the other in total amazement. “What on earth are they thinking about?!!” I thought. When I had recovered enough poise to speak without exploding, I asked, “What does being white and not wearing a suit and tie have to do with being a child of God? Those people believe the same things we believe. God loves them just as much as He loves us. So, what is the problem?”

The pastor had been standing quietly by up to this point. He finally spoke, “The women said that we almost didn’t have enough food.” From that moment on, I couldn’t hear what they were saying to me. It didn’t matter anymore. I had lost my respect for those men. It became so clear to me that I was seeing something in them that I hadn’t seen before. Something inside of me died in my relationship with them. I never apologized, for I knew I had done nothing wrong. In my mind Jesus would have done the same thing. Eventually, I left that church.

That episode makes it clear that there is an irreconcilable, fatal flaw in the hearts of human beings. There are many ways that this flaw manifests itself, but in this case it appeared in the form of religious, cultural, and racial bias.

You would think that the fact that our congregation loved the Lord and those friends of mine loved the Lord, would be a strong basis for unity.¹ But the reality is that there was an impenetrable wall between the two groups. That wall is evidence of the fatal flaw of disunity in Christianity, and in mankind in general.

Why couldn’t my congregation have seen the hearts of my friends? Isn’t one of the purposes of the gospel to tear down walls that divide? Why were they not able to see through the external

appearances, and look right into the heart? It’s because an essential element is missing. In order to see someone’s heart, you have to be able to see through the eyes of love. Love is the missing element.



“Why did you invite all those white hippies to our homecoming?!” snapped one deacon. Another deacon followed with, “And they didn’t even have enough respect for the pastors to wear a suit and tie!”



How does one come by that kind of love? God only gives that kind of love by His Spirit,² and He only gives His Spirit to those who obey Him.³

I knew my friends fairly well back then. I had visited them quite often. They were unique, quite different from any other believers I had ever met. They all, every one of them, lived together in community. They shared everything, as I had read so many times in the Book of Acts. On several

occasions, they had even invited me to come and live with them in their homes. Of course, I declined at the time. Like the other members in my congregation, I had my own house, car, job, and bills to pay. Incidentally,

not one of the members of my congregation had ever invited me to come live with them, nor did I ever invite them. It was entirely out of the question — completely unimaginable.

The contrast between us and that community was quite stark. There were no poor or rich among them. They lived decently, but no one had more than he needed while someone else struggled to make ends meet. They met each other’s needs, right down to the last man.⁴ If one was poor, they all were poor. If one prospered, they all prospered.

Unfortunately, I could not say the same about our congregation. Some of us made very good money, while others lived in the projects, struggling to keep food on the table. One precious family in our congregation had many children. The mother worked, scrimping and scraping, trying to keep all those children clothed and fed, while her husband drank away every penny he could get his hands on.

We in the congregation knew these things, but the fatal flaw of our own selfish

pursuits caused us to ignore what we knew. We saw this family week after week, and never proposed to take them into our own homes. Whenever I spoke with the mother, she always demonstrated a total determination to “trust in the Lord,” as she put it.

On one occasion, we had a meeting of all the men to plan a trip for the church. One brother proposed a deep-sea fishing trip out of Florida. He had looked into it, and the cost would be

¹ Colossians 3:11 ² Romans 5:5 ³ Acts 5:32 ⁴ Deuteronomy 15:4 ⁵ Luke 16:19-31

Homecoming

only around three hundred dollars per person, for hotel, food, and boat rental. Some thought it was a good idea. I asked how the poor ones in the congregation were going to afford that. The brother who made the proposal replied that some people would always be left out of things. “You can’t let that fact ruin it for the rest of the congregation,” he said, without any hint of apology or shame. Several agreed. Right then, something died inside of me.⁵

Don’t get the impression that I was any better than they. I might have been appalled at the selfish proposal of that meeting, but I got a good opportunity to see an even worse kind of selfishness at work within my very own heart.

A friend of mine had a ministry in the inner city with poor blacks, but he was a member of one of the richest congregations in the whole city. A poor couple from New Jersey needed a place to stay. Instead of asking the members of his rich congregation to take this couple in, he asked whether I could do it. I agreed, thinking it would be only for a couple of days.

They arrived at my house in their old car. They were white, and I hoped they wouldn’t have any qualms about staying in the house of a black man. I was surprised to see that they had a baby. I welcomed them into the house and showed them where they would stay. They were poor, having no money even for gas for their car. My heart went out to them — at least for the first two or three days. After that, things started to get hard.

The couple didn’t do anything differently, but I started to see all their needs, and tried to meet them. The baby needed diapers, baby food, and milk. The man needed gas money to “take care of business.” The woman needed various things. My budget was being stretched to the limit. I started wondering when they were going to leave. The thought of them staying much longer was terrifying. Somebody

was always in the bathroom when I wanted to go. This was intolerable. Besides that, the woman always curled her feet under her when she sat on my sofa. That was bad enough, but she made things worse by not taking her shoes off. The man didn’t have a job, so he didn’t contribute anything to lighten the load.

Why is it that in our congregation we were completely willing to ignore the plight of the poor among us, and enjoy spending money on our own pleasure that would have been better used to alleviate their suffering? Why didn’t we have the power to simply love? Is it possible that we were not following the true Savior?

I would sit at the table and watch them as we ate our meals. The thought continually ran through my mind that they were eating me out of house and home, especially when they wanted seconds. They didn’t even help with the dishes. That was just too much. After about a week and a half, things cleared up for them in New Jersey, and I distinctly remember how happy I was when they were gone. I was so happy and relieved.

It is only in retrospect that I understand the depths of my inability to give to the point of sacrificial love. I gave grudgingly and with much complaint in my heart. In time, it would have surfaced and come out in words. I was completely divided from that couple in their time of need. I was hoping I would never see them again. I was offended by my friend and his congregation who had “saddled” me with those people, and didn’t offer to help financially. The fatal flaw of selfishness was glaringly obvious.

I failed to mention that the couple who stayed with me were fellow Christians. That fact caused many questions to stir in my mind. Why, then, was I not able to love them and care for them as for my own family? Why is it that in our congregation we were completely willing to ignore the plight of the poor among us, and enjoy spending money on our own pleasure that would have

been better used to alleviate their suffering? Why didn’t we have the power to simply love? Is it possible that we were not following the true Savior?

Every evening, I worked in a Christian radio station. With soothing, emotionally charged music, I would softly compel the listeners to consider their relationship with the Lord, and

to ask Him to come into their hearts to save them from their sins. When the final broadcasts were done after midnight, I would sign off the air. When all was in order, I fell apart, and lay often on the floor weeping, and begging God to take my life, because I knew how

rotten, perverted, and selfish I was inside. My only drive in life was to satisfy whatever urge was active at the moment. I told others how Jesus could save them, but He couldn’t save me.

I associated with many Christian groups, hoping to find something that would give me real hope. I found no hope. There was no environment for healing, no solution for the fatal flaw that I saw in myself and in the members of my congregation. Christianity offered no hope to change. There were doctrines and all kinds of counselors, but no observable reality that I could grasp and hold on to.

Romans 1:16 talks about a gospel that can save, that has power, but the gospel I had received could not save me. And that gospel never resulted in any kind of lasting unity. Being members of the same church, or of the same denomination, and agreeing on the same creed is not what true unity is all about. Where was there any real power to change people?

In utter despair and hopelessness, I found myself walking onto one of the main bridges in our city, the Market Street Bridge. I didn’t remember driving there, or thinking about going there, but I went as if compelled by something other than myself. Having parked my car in a nearby parking lot, I got out, and just started walking, with no destination in particular.

Homecoming

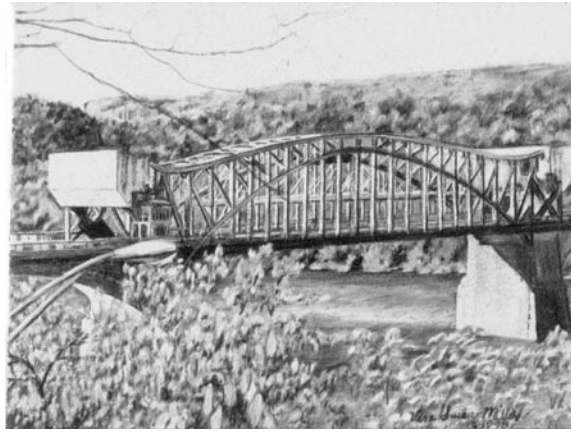
Somewhere near the center of the bridge, I stopped, and leaned on the concrete safety rails. Looking down into the waters far below, the kernel of a terrifyingly horrible idea began to grow in my mind. Nausea swept over my whole body as I tried to deny the thought, but deep down inside I knew why I had come. As I stood on that bridge, trying to muster up the courage to do the unthinkable, scenes of my life passed through my mind with stark clarity. The more I thought on all those years of my life, the more I could see my own selfish behavior. Even what I had called love was only based on what pleasure I could derive from the object of that emotion. I was a Christian, but I didn't know how to love.

Weariness, like a heavy, unbearable shroud, settled over my entire being. I knew I could not go on another moment.

"Aw g'wone and jump won'tcha," came a voice from behind me. It had the startling effect of a gunshot. Jerking around, I stared at the speaker.

"We done been here twenty minutes a'ready, an' ye hadn't done nothing yit!"

I stared... speechless. Just a few feet away from me was a dirty pickup truck with two grimy men in it. One had tobacco juice running down his chin. Both, wearing overalls, grinned as I stared at them sheepishly, my face glowing hot with embarrassment. They drove away laughing as I stood there seeing my own ridiculousness. I hurried off the bridge to my car. The tears were coming like a flood. I couldn't hold it back, but I didn't want to be seen crying like that in public. I followed a side street where not many people walked. Finding my car, I quickly got in, locked the doors, and closed the windows, while I wept loudly, convulsively, uncontrollably.



"God!" I screamed. "God! God! Help me! Please, please, help me, God!" I pounded the steering wheel, as the hopelessness crushed me mercilessly under its heavy weight.

The days went by in a certain colorless haze, without meaning. It was during those days that I met my friends who came to the homecoming. They were so different from anyone I

It slowly dawned on me that the life I was so fascinated with in the Book of Acts was actually leaping off the pages of the Bible, right in front of my eyes!

had ever met. Even though I was very cynical when I met them, a tiny spark of the possibility of hope was kindled in my failing heart. I had to cling to it, or return to that unthinkable road I had almost embarked upon... next time with surely no way back. I had to see what these people were about.

As I continued to visit my friends, I saw them lovingly caring for one another's needs, working together, and giving themselves unselfishly. It slowly dawned on me that the life I was so fascinated with in the Book of Acts was actually leaping off the pages of the Bible, right in front of my eyes! I could read chapters 2 and

4, and then look around me, and there it was!

They had found the way to deal with that fatal flaw that causes one to despise or ignore those less capable than oneself. They were learning how to really deal with the selfish ways that divide and destroy people all over the world. What they demonstrated on a daily basis was the life that the true gospel produces. I could see real evidence that the love of God had been poured out

in their lives. I wanted desperately what they had. I needed it!

I finally came to live with these people. The salvation I found in their Savior, the Jesus of the Bible, brought me into the same life I can read about in the Bible. That was twenty-eight years ago. I'm still here, and my love for those I live with has grown deeper, and is still growing, as we seek together to do the will of our Father.

I marvel sometimes at the change. It's now clear to me that such a change can take place only in the place where His life is.⁶ That is the only place where He pours out His blessing of life everlasting.⁷

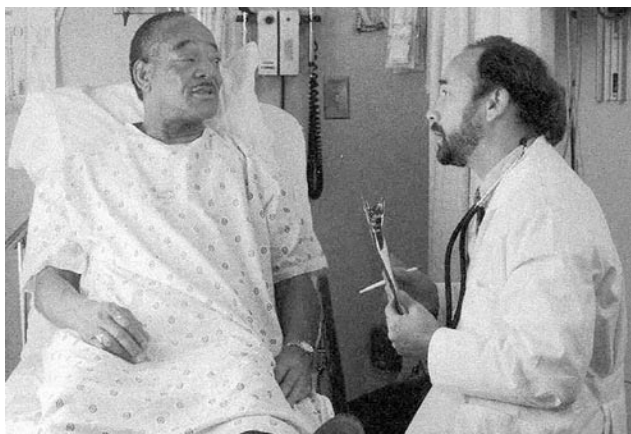
In Acts 2:44 it says, "all who believed were together." That is the truth, and it is the pattern for the church for all times. All who believe will be together, being of one heart and one soul.⁸ In that place we are being healed from the fatal flaw of selfishness, which causes disunity. You are always welcome to come and see for yourself.



**Be on the lookout for John Stringer's upcoming book,
*Setting All Things Straight***

⁶ 1 Timothy 2:8 ⁷ Psalm 133 ⁸ Acts 4:32

The Final Diagnosis: **Fatal!**



Richard watched the doctor's expressions closely as he thoroughly examined his torso, listening to his heart, then tapping him here and there. It had been quite a while since he had been to a doctor. He always dreaded the possibility of hearing something "really bad" about his condition, even if he was only suffering from a toothache. This time, however, he knew he had to get help. He felt so uncomfortable lately, and was losing weight fast. His strength was failing, and he was always tired. He was sure it was something simple, and would require a simple remedy. He just didn't know how to deal with it himself.

The doctor hung the stethoscope on the wall, and turned to Richard. His usually cheerful manner had changed a bit.

"What do you think, Scott?" asked Richard, feeling rather nervous.

"Go ahead and get dressed," replied the doctor. "Then I'll see you in my office." Turning, he left his patient in the examination room to finish dressing.

Pausing at the door, Richard swallowed to calm his nerves. He entered the office where Scott greeted him and pointed to a chair in front of his large oak desk. He thought Scott appeared more serious than usual, as he went through the medical reports on

the desk. Finally lifting his head, Scott looked Richard directly in the eye, and began to speak softly. "Richard, we've been friends for a long time, so I'm going to be quite frank with you."

"Whoa, Scott!" said Richard, sitting straight in his chair. "That kind of opening scares me!"

"You should have dealt with this much earlier, Richard. According to these x-rays and lab reports, my suspicions are confirmed. You have a large tumor on your liver, and it has metastasized to your lungs. There are several tumors in both lungs, and they are all malignant." Scott paused, removing his glasses. He looked gently at Richard and continued, "I hate to be the one to tell you this, but then again, maybe it's best coming from a friend. What you have, Richard, is terminal cancer. It's gone far beyond anything we can do. I'm afraid it's fatal."

Richard stared blankly as if he hadn't heard. He felt as if the whole world had fallen onto his chest, and was crushing the breath out of him. He looked at Scott, then all around the room, as if he expected someone else to say something. He had known something was wrong, but he didn't want to face it. Now it was clear. He was going to die. There was no way out of it. He was going to die.

Literally thousands of people every month have had this kind of news, or something similar, broken to them. They are told that their condition is fatal. Countless more will hear the same diagnosis as

the years go by. It is a daily occurrence in the medical world. But isn't there something similar in the social realm? Has there been any kind of examination of how people relate to one another?

Yes. Every newspaper, news report, social documentary, or any other study on human relationships, point out quite clearly that man is a fatally flawed race. It is clear that there is an irreparable, devastating, fatal flaw in man's ability to get along with one another. There are simple ways in which this disunity comes out. For instance, members of the same family have more than one TV set. Why? Because they can't agree on which program to watch together.

Or look at the rush-hour traffic on the highway. Which lanes are the most crowded, and which lane has the least traffic? We all know that the carpool lane has the fewest people. To use this lane you have to be with at least one other person. The horribly jam-packed traffic of the main three or four lanes make it clear that most people prefer to travel alone, in their own vehicle, rather than be with another person, even if it means facing twice-daily traffic jams, bottlenecks, and stressed-out nerves.

So the drivers in the carpool lane must be people who really care and share, you'd think. In many cases that's true. Yet traffic reports indicate that there is an interesting problem appearing in the carpool lane. The law

requires that you travel with at least one other person in order to use that lane. Some individuals have gone so far as to place a life-sized mannequin (dummy) in the passenger's seat, giving the appearance of driving with another person. They would rather be with a dummy than with a real person.



Fatal: 1) Causing, or capable of causing death; 2) Having extremely unfortunate or dire consequences; 3) Causing destruction, disaster, or ruin.

The Final Diagnosis: **Fatal!**

I'm sure these would be rather benign examples to some. Extreme examples would include the fact that all over the world countries or ethnic groups are at war with one another. The utter devastation and tragedy of destroyed human life and relationships can never be fully measured or appreciated. The flaw is fatal. The breach is beyond repair by human wisdom and strategy. No one has yet been able to devise a plan that produced lasting peace between nations or individuals.

How can man put an end to war, before war puts an end to man?

Many desperately seek the answer to that question, especially in regions ravaged by war. Hundreds of thousands have turned to religion to find answers and solutions. Surely in the church you will find God's answers and His solutions, even for the wrong ways in your own soul. Filled with hope and expectation, as a last desperate measure, these unsuspecting souls enter into something they never fully investigated. Present-day statistics show that this last refuge of hope and security, the church, manifests the same fatal flaw of humanity, perhaps to an even greater degree than any other institution.

The fatal flaw of humanity is expressed in disunity. Man is irreconcilably divided. The message of Christianity is supposed to be unity: one God, one faith, one baptism.¹ According to the church, the message of Jesus is love and unity. Any soul desperate for peace, love, and security would turn to the church after hearing that in this place is the end of disunity and fatal divisions that he is daily confronted with. The love of God ought to be thriving in such a place. However, instead there is a growing number of disenchanted Christians. They see within Christianity the same fatal flaw that plagues humanity. The very place where they went to find brotherly kindness, love, and unity is hopelessly divided. There are presently 37,000 different denominations. Are

these the ones who are going to teach about love and unity?

There is a place in the Bible that says there are to be no divisions in the church. It says they are to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. That means they are to agree with each other.² All denominations know that. Yet they have found a way to *not* do what is clearly written in the Scriptures. It's called "agreeing to disagree." They say that in spite of their differences there is "unity in diversity."

*"I have learned that although Christians do not always agree, they can disagree agreeably... within the true church there is a mysterious unity that overrides all divisive factors."*³

—Billy Graham

37,000 denominations means at least 37,000 points of disagreement, 37,000 reasons why they cannot worship together in spirit and in truth.

The Word says not to disagree. Denominations say that it's okay to disagree and have determined to do it, in spite of what the Bible says. Is there any wonder why two billion Christians have virtually no effect on bringing about unity in this world?

Almost 2,000 years ago, a small group of disciples had a very different effect on their society. It was said they "turned the world upside down."⁴ They did it by demonstrating their love and unity. The gospel they heard affected them so deeply, they lived together, caring for each other's needs, and sharing everything in common with each other. Anyone could clearly see them living together and interacting this way.⁵ What they were doing and how they were living was in total agreement with what Jesus had commanded them to do in John 13:34-35.

They demonstrated a visible love and unity that results from obeying the true gospel. Any desperate person could come into their midst and find forgiveness, love, and unity. That's why souls were added to their number

daily — not just increasing church membership, but people actually living together in a covenant relationship. They found the solution to the fatal flaw of humanity.

Without that solution, people are not able to love one another and live peacefully together because the love of God is missing in them. Humans, as a whole, are able to unconditionally love this way only when the love of God is poured out in their hearts.⁶ His Spirit pours out His love into the hearts of those who belong to Him. They will always be one heart and one soul.⁷

Do you think His Spirit is in all those 37,000 denominations that don't agree? Do you think His love has been poured out in their hearts? It doesn't matter how sincere they are, He doesn't pour His love out into divisions. Yahshua Himself said that a house divided can only fall.⁸ 37,000 denominations means at least 37,000 points of disagreement, 37,000 reasons why they cannot worship together in truth and in spirit.⁹

So, where do you go to get out of all the disunity and devastation all around us? Where do love and peace abound? In that place, where the true gospel is preached, it will have the same effect as in the Book of Acts. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and His Spirit still produces the same results today as He did in Acts.¹⁰ His love poured out in your heart will cause you to want to live together with your brothers and sisters, and care for them, and they for you, for the rest of your life.

In the place where all the members are living that way, you will find the true Son of God.¹¹ In that place and environment, the fatal flaw is removed and the wounds begin to heal. The true meaning and purpose of life begins to unfold.

There is a place where the fatal flaw in man can be both removed and healed. If you're as desperate about that and other things as we were, then we invite you to come visit us for as long as you like. 🙏

¹ Ephesians 4:5 ² 1 Corinthians 1:10 ³ Billy Graham, *Growing as a Christian*, p.31 ⁴ Acts 17:6 ⁵ Acts 2:37-47; 4:32-37 ⁶ Romans 5:5 ⁷ Acts 4:32 ⁸ Matthew 12:25 ⁹ John 4:23-24 ¹⁰ Hebrews 13:8 ¹¹ John 12:26

FINDING MY WAY HOME

My life drastically changed for the better at the age of 17 when I first came to know about the Community. It is amazing to me, however, to look back now, at the age of forty-nine, and realize how ravaged my soul already was at that young age. I had cultivated a life of guilt and deceit, revealing the fatally flawed condition of my soul through the choices I had made. Flawed, in the sense of character; fatal, in the sense of my inability to change my state of being. Most people might not have noticed, though, as these things are often camouflaged, having to do with the deep inner workings of the soul.

I was like most anyone else born into the American dream of becoming something and leaving my mark in life. Yet at the same time, I had this terminal “disconnect” condition within me. My conscience had been effectively switched off through years of constant suppression. Though only 17, I was given over to immorality and vices that were destroying my life and the lives of those around me. I was alienated, depressed, alone, and divided from others. My rebellious teenage years had sent me into high gear, accelerating my plunge into debauchery.

Feelings of inadequacy and uselessness lurked within, although outwardly I was extremely social, bright, and outgoing. I did not have the inner worth that comes from obeying one’s conscience. During those early years, I constantly tried to compensate for my sense of inferiority. More than a handful for my parents, with my strong personality, I needed a strong authority figure with a firm hand to direct my energies. Sadly, my father was not closely involved for most of my formative years, and my mother worked to help carry the costs of living. They did the very best they could, and certainly taught me spiritual principles and moral values, but still I grew up very independent,

strong-willed and insecure. It was a bad recipe that was destined to flop.

During my teenage years, I craved acceptance and dreaded any sense of rejection. I didn’t realize that the fatal flaw of self-concern would lead me in such a devastating direction. Entering high school, I was determined to come out of my shell of introspection. Scott, who had been one of my very best friends, did not now seem “up to par” for the kind of friends I thought I needed to have. So, I turned against



I got involved with a girl in high school, but it was all for a show. We could never communicate honestly or deeply with each other, as both of us were like faceless mannequins without a heart or soul.

him and any other genuine friends I had, in order to become popular and fit in with the cooler crowd. I determined within myself to break the mold and become an entirely different person, but in reality, I was plunging my soul into deeper, darker waters from which I would not be able to free myself.

I wanted to have friends and feel accepted and loved, but I didn’t see that I already had this and was rejecting it because of the deep feeling of inadequacy that plagued me. It was the fruit of rebellion and the rejection of authority in my life. As a result, I

had no anchor for my soul, so who and what I really was eluded me. I remember finding out much later how deeply my words and actions hurt my parents and the few genuine friends who had been so kind to me. I did not have the power within myself to recover those friendships or heal the alienation between me and my parents.

I got involved with a girl in high school who met all my outward criteria, but it was all for a show, not really from my heart. We could never communicate honestly or deeply with each other, as both of us were like faceless mannequins without a heart or soul. I led her along in this pretense for a few years during high school, until she went out on me, and I felt obliged to do the same. It was a nasty outcome, causing us to part with an irreconcilable rift, being filled with animosity and resentment towards each other. The wounds never healed.

In such a blinded state, I was unconsciously led by various impulses and desires into other selfish relationships that gave opportunity for the fatal flaw to reach its ultimate climax in my life. My deviant behavior was so shameful, and my family was mortified, having been publicly disgraced and humiliated. Any remaining relationships were ruined, though I scrambled to cover whatever I could with as many lies as possible to save my family from undeserved grief and remorse over my own unseemly actions. I cannot count how many times I came home at 5 in the morning to find my mother asleep on the couch, having waited up for me all night, and then to see her cry when I woke her. Not much was said, but I knew, seeing the Bible nearby, that she was in turmoil. All she knew was to read and pray.

With a hardened conscience I would scold her for waiting up for me. The quarreling that followed only made matters worse. One day, I slammed the door to silence her pleading voice,

and when I was finally alone with my thoughts, it hit me: I was a dead man. Full of reasoning, full of lies, yet somewhere deep, deep inside, like a fading ember discarded after a fire that had long died out, the tiniest flicker of shame glowed in my long-suppressed conscience. As I dropped into bed, I refused to allow anything to reach me. The year continued, and I had to cover my tracks: skipping school, associating with those who cloak their guilt with darkness, drinking, racing, nightclubs, on and on.

There is a proverb that says, “As a man thinks, so he is.” How true! Those who feel little worth about themselves end up doing worthless things. If you think this way, you tend to associate with those who think the same way. There is hardly anything more destructive than that feeling of worthlessness. In the scriptures it is called, *Belial*¹ — another name for the evil one. Everything vile, coarse, filthy, degrading, and evil comes from entertaining such company. How deceived I was when I rejected my father’s authority in my life, and my mother’s attention. What ruin I experienced as the due penalty for how I plunged my soul into such darkness!

I wanted to get away, as quickly as I could. I could not handle living in the same house anymore, or even living in the same city with those who participated with me in such evil. They all knew too much; they were all equally guilty. So, I did what I could to save face, and applied for a scholarship to a faraway university. As it turned out, I received not just one, but two scholarships. This helped to compensate for all the humiliation I had brought upon myself, my family, and others. I thought I could begin life over again with new friends, in a new location. I hated what I had become, and all the lies I had told to cover over the shame and guilt of my life.

Oh, what freedom! A new start!

But wait... What was this? How foolish I was! My fatal flaw could not be healed by merely moving to a new

city, or finding a new set of friends. I had tried to believe everything would change, but in the end I found that I was the problem. I was trying to run away from myself. It really didn’t matter where I went, or who I was with.

There is a proverb that says, “As a man thinks, so he is.” How true! Those who feel little worth about themselves end up doing worthless things. If you think this way, you tend to associate with those who think the same way.

I left Shelia only to find Sue, and now it wasn’t Joe, but Mark — the exact same personalities, but with different names and faces. How could they be so exactly the same, along with the façade and enticements to do exactly the same things I was trying to escape from? Such madness! What was wrong with me? I had thought I could just flick a switch, and it would all be over, but it wasn’t.

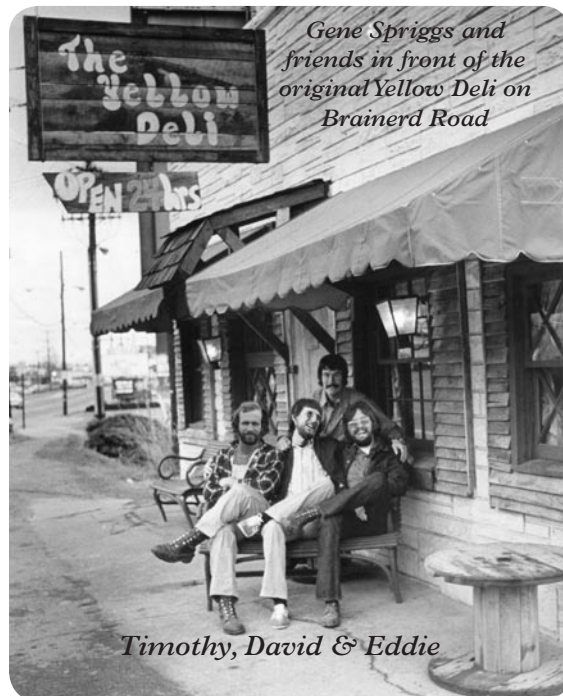
From that point on, I had to start facing what was in me. The smoldering ember of my conscience had not yet completely burned out. That was the only remnant of hope I had. “Please don’t go out! Please, God, don’t let it go out!”

I would go to the mirror every day and just cry and cry, in such grief and pain, when I realized that everything I had experienced was entirely my fault. No one else could I blame. It was all on me. I was so lonely and divided from everyone. There was nothing I could do to ever change the past. I had tried to run away from it, but it

haunted me and caught up to me in the form of other human beings. The fatal flaw was terminal. I was on a collision course with death, and there was no way to change it.

When I finally started to wake up, can you imagine how desperate I became? Not a day went by without another dreadful thought reminding me of what I had done that held such irreversible consequences. What was most painful to reckon with was the knowledge that I was responsible for the hatred that so many people now had towards me. I tried and tried to make things as right as I could, to repair the damage, but some wouldn’t even open the door when they heard my voice. I would drive away slowly, crying still more. Some people that I had irreparably hurt, I couldn’t even face. It wasn’t even worth the effort, not only because I couldn’t face the shame, but because I knew they wouldn’t even care. The very thing I wanted — to love and be loved — I had prevented by my own pride and sense of worthlessness.

Then one day, between orientation and the start of classes, my older sister asked me to go to lunch with



Gene Spriggs and friends in front of the original Yellow Deli on Brainerd Road

Timothy, David & Eddie

¹ Belial — A personification of evil or worthlessness, mentioned in the Bible and often thought of as a devil or demon.

her. She had come close to a nervous breakdown due to a divorce. “Seven years!” she screamed aloud as we sped away in a car, “seven years, for nothing!” Tears rolled down her face. I sat there in silence. What could I do? Nothing. I just watched her quietly sob as we drove quickly down the highway. What was really baffling and troubling was the fact that although I was close to my sister and loved her very much, all I could see was myself in her ex-husband. I hated and loathed how he treated her, going out all night, gambling and drinking. I pulled down the visor to shade my eyes from the sun and noticed myself in the mirror. My eyes started to fill with tears.

“There is a nice little café called the *Yellow Deli* on Brainerd Road,” she said after a long silence. “I thought we could eat lunch there. The people are very kind.”

“What sort of place is it?” I asked.

“Oh, you will see. They have great food.”

We finally reached the café and went in. Then it hit me! Once, in high school, a friend had taken me to this deli. But now, I was looking with new eyes. The music, the shining faces, the way people worked — something was strange... What was it? I found out that the deli was operated by a community of people who lived together, sharing all they had, and the young woman at the counter placed a card in my hand, warmly inviting me to come to a meeting.

The love and warmth of her words and her smile drew me like a magnet to their next meeting. I went alone, a bit timid, not knowing anyone there. Nevertheless, something was drawing me, and I could not resist. I walked into a room packed full of people and literally had to sit down on the floor as there was no other place to sit. As everyone spoke his heart in the soft glow of amber lighting, I noticed the faces of those who were speaking. “What is going on here?” I thought to myself. “What have I walked into?” It was like nothing I had ever experienced in my life. Everyone was intently listening. Every eye was fixed

on those speaking. The singing, the smiles, and the warmth of their love for one another — it all captivated me. I was spellbound. The genuine love and welcome after the meeting was overwhelming, and I had one thought: “I’m HOME!”

Because I was not yet 18, I was encouraged, out of respect for my parents’ authority, to continue on in college, but it was like torture. Although I was doing very well academically, it didn’t mean anything to me. Life wasn’t worth living without a remedy to the fatal flaw I was afflicted with. Was a career going to compensate for the guilt I could not by my own power escape from?



Love reached the smoldering ember in my heart and caught it on fire.

The words I heard spoke right to my heart. They had the cure and the life that could heal me from the fatal flaw of mankind. Even the most devastating defects could be healed by faith in Yahshua, the Messiah, if I would surrender everything to follow Him, and leave the world behind. I knew where I belonged. As soon as that first year of college came to an end, I spoke with my parents (whom I now wanted to honor and respect, making up for all the years of turmoil I had caused them), expressing what I knew to be true in my heart about joining the community. They listened and gave me their blessing and support. That was it! I was packing my bags in an instant, and out the door I went! Home, I got to go home, where my heart belongs!

That was 32 years ago. My life is

totally united with these people. The anguish of my guilt and shame has forever been removed through the sacrifice of Yahshua, the Messiah. No more did I have to live in the misery of unconfessed sin, chained to feelings of worthlessness and pride. It was all a lie. Over the years, little by little, love has reached deep into the crevasses of my soul to unlock the truth of who and what I am. It hasn’t always been easy to face, but the love of our Father and the love of my brothers and sisters is stronger than the clinging tentacles of the evil one. Love reached the smoldering ember in my heart and caught it on fire. I met my wife here in the community, and have been blessed with four beautiful and amazing children who have grown up to follow me in this lifelong covenant with our Master Yahshua.

There is a welcome sign hanging on every door of the communities of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The fatal flaw that afflicts humanity has ravaged us all, but we know the remedy, and we have the healing balm to cure these maladies. The life I have experienced here in the Twelve Tribes has become richer and deeper as the years have passed. Our life is even more vibrant now than when I first encountered it, with the fuller expression of that love being expressed all over the world in all of our tribes and clans, united as one in community. You will have to come and see whether my words are true. Maybe, if you come, then you too will be like I was, overwhelmed by the life and love of our Master and His people, and respond joyfully by saying, “I’m home. I’m finally HOME!”

Arthur





Mankind: Afflicted With a Fatal Flaw

Man is a fatally flawed race — afflicted¹ with a fatal flaw. How can he be healed?² Men have a fatal influence on one another instead of a life-giving influence. Man is a fatally ruined race, given to fate. “Man o’ man!” Man, fallen as he is, is a fatally flawed race. This is in no other way more starkly evident or manifested than in his inability to get along together in peace. Man’s devastating flaw is expressed in the disunity between each other.

Yahshua, the Son of God, said, “Love one another as I have loved you.”³ To love one another is the very purpose of the church, to be the light of and for the world,⁴ to light the way to peace, to the Prince of Peace, to escape from the prince of darkness.⁵ It is the light of the stark evidence of the love of God poured out in the heart of His people on earth. The unity Yahshua prayed for in John 17:23 is the evidence of the love He commanded in John 13:34-35, which the prophet Isaiah said would have a startling effect upon the world,⁶ the very witness of the coming kingdom.⁷ Yahshua’s followers were to be a contrasting society. The contrast would be startling since the whole course of human history is stained by man’s red blood.

As John F. Kennedy said, “Mankind must put an end to war before war puts

an end to mankind.” How can this happen? This is why when Messiah comes, He, with His bride with Him, will put an end to war and bloodshed.⁸ This is why the prayer He prayed⁹ is so essential to the preservation of His saints, who will draw all who take notice of the light, to be that coming army being raised up in this time, to be His soldiers who are not entangled in the affairs of this world.¹⁰

The true gospel puts an end to the division that is so prevalent among the supposed disciples, denominations, and denominationalism of the Christian religion — the antithesis of the unity among the believers in the One who commanded that we love one another:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Unity is the fruit of love between each and every member of Messiah, who know the Father through the Son, to be in unity as they are, and no less one than they actually are, or His prayer is not answered:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You,

that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent Me and loved them even as you loved Me.” (John 17:20-23)

So the gospel is the only solution to the most devastating problem in human history, but unity is far, far away from a bitterly divided and terrified world, and unity is also the most crucial necessity of our twelve tribes *now* (Acts 26:7), and yes, challenge, to keep our communion with Him, which can never be perfected in love except by joining our prayer with His to be delivered from the “divider.”¹¹

The gospel addresses the great issue of peace and harmony¹² among those who belong to the One who prayed for them — those who pray as He prayed for this unity, this oneness as the Father and the Son. The infallible sign of His church, His Body,¹³ is the unity that comes from that love and humility,¹⁴ and the lack of that unity is also the infallible sign of who or what (with its 37,000 divisions) is not His church.

Our Savior and Redeemer is the Prince of Peace,¹⁵ and His Body is the corporate Immanuel,¹⁶ as it is made





known to all that God indwells Him and His wife¹⁷ or His many brothers¹⁸ as they give light to “those who sit in darkness.”¹⁹ Satan is the prince of darkness,²⁰ building walls of strife and division.

The gospel of peace is what we preach,²¹ producing the bond of peace,²² bonding one another together in peace. The gospel of peace must be proclaimed as a witness by a people who bear witness of the Kingdom.²³ The Kingdom must be preached by all who believe and live together and have all things in common, as the word *believe* actually means and is demonstrated:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. (Acts 4:32; see also John 13:34-35; 17:21-23)

This is what it means to believe in Him, so there is no one who truly believes

who does not live together and have all things in common with his fellow *believers*. After all, this is what love is:

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers... And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us. (1 John 3:16,23; see also John 13:34-35)

The promise in John 5:24 cannot be separated from the evidence of 1 John 3:14 any more than John 3:16 can be separated from Acts 2:44, or John 17:21-23 from Acts 4:32.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. (1 John 3:14)

Those who live together in peace²⁴ in every town or city (which is what *place* means in 1 Corinthians 1:2²⁵), as the apostle Paul commands in 1 Corinthians 1:10, are a corporate ambassador of Messiah, preaching reconciliation with

God. But it requires a community of people who are actually reconciled to one another. There can be no credibility to the gospel otherwise. All the elders of the church in Ephesus were one, non-denominational, but there was a solemn warning.²⁶

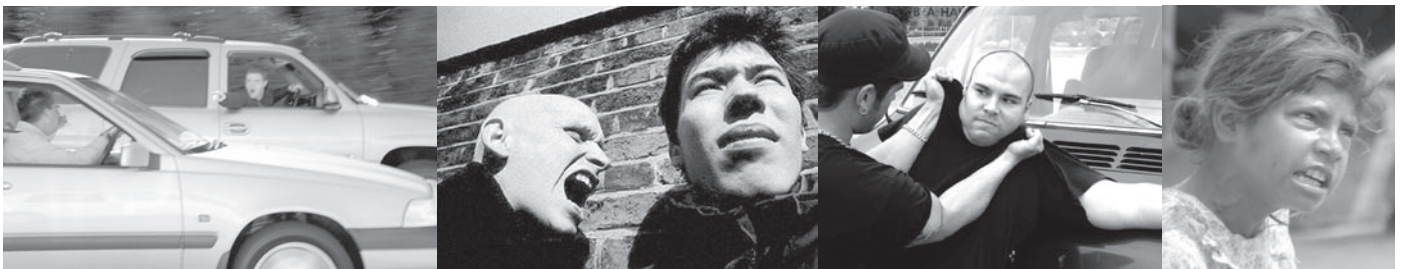
Christians cannot be “Christ’s ambassadors” reconciling men to God in one of their 37,000 denominations. So the thinking men or skeptics in the world will ask, “Why, if you are reconciled to God, are you so divided among yourselves?” As Christ Himself said:

“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.” (Matthew 12:25)

The love and unity of His people is the evidence of His sovereignty over them. Love is the infallible witness and sign of His *edah* (the Hebrew term that means both *witness* and *community* in Jeremiah 30:20), the testimony of the truth by those who are of the truth.²⁷ The gates of hell cannot prevail²⁸ against this witness of the truth by those who are as 1 Corinthians 1:10, but to be as verse 13 shows that the gates of hell were already overtaking that divided church, which was no longer on the Rock.²⁹

No one can love as He commanded without His love in their heart and soul.

¹ Afflict — crush; strike down or against; distress physically or mentally (or spiritually, socially, emotionally, Eph 4:15; Mt 5:14) ² Revelation 21:4; 22:2; 21:24 ³ John 13:34 ⁴ Matthew 5:14 ⁵ Luke 1:78-79 ⁶ Isaiah 52:15 ⁷ Matthew 24:14 ⁸ Revelation 19:7-21 ⁹ John 17:23 ¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:4 ¹¹ Matthew 6:13; John 17:9,11,12,15,16,21-23 ¹² Ephesians 4:2-3 ¹³ Colossians 1:18,24; Ephesians 1:22-23 ¹⁴ 1 John 3:14,16,23 ¹⁵ Isaiah 9:6-7 ¹⁶ Matthew 1:23; Ephesians 2:22 ¹⁷ Revelation 21:9,12 ¹⁸ Hebrews 2:11 ¹⁹ Luke 1:79 ²⁰ Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19 ²¹ Ephesians 6:15 ²² Ephesians 4:1-3 ²³ Matthew 12:25; John 18:37 ²⁴ John 17:21-23; Acts 4:32 ²⁵ And also: 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Timothy 2:8; Malachi 1:11 ²⁶ Acts 20:17,28-30 ²⁷ John 18:37; 1 Timothy 3:15 ²⁸ Matthew 16:18 ²⁹ See “Upon this Rock” at: <http://www.twelvetribe.org/publications/upon-this-rock.html>





So skeptics can't be blamed for asking, since they have not been bamboozled by Christian theologians who preach "unity in diversity" to justify their disunity that betrays the fatal flaw of what calls itself the "church" today. The love of John 13:34 is the infallible sign of His true church, and this love is what causes the oneness the Master Yahshua prayed for in John 17:20-23. Love is His Spirit³⁰ received by the one who is of the truth and is willing to do God's will.³¹ And all who actually hate their life in this world will be able to serve Him where He is, and are honored there by His Father:

"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." (John 12:25-26)

But as the world takes up the sword, so do all Christians down through history, who are part of the fatally flawed race of man. Christians take up the sword to kill other Christians, who are enemies instead of friends. Friends and brothers are those who are standing together, allied in the same cause, struggling together against constant attack from their common adversary.³²

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I

command you." (John 15:13-14)

So does this mean to take up the sword against your friend and brother?³³ Then who are His people? Surely not those who take up the sword against one another in war. How many wars will it take to put an end to all Christians who take up the sword?³⁴

Love and unity are the evidence for the world — for all men — to see.³⁵ In Yahshua's intercessory prayer, He asks repeatedly for the unity of His people. Why? That the world may believe that the Father sent Him,³⁶ and by this all men will know who His disciples are, and who are not His disciples.³⁷ The faith in Yahshua which the Father requires of men is not a blind faith.³⁸ He offers infallible proof, evidence by which men can *know* and *believe*. The unity of the Body of Messiah is that proof, and in these last days, after the foundation is laid, it will be and must be the most compelling proof, the most potent argument of the truth of the gospel.

Christianity is divided above all other people and religions, and is in no way, except in the negative, the proof that Yahshua received what He prayed for. It is not what He meant for His Body to be like. Matthew 12:25 is its condemnation. It is addressed to Christianity today, specifically. The Christian church is broken into thousands of competing fragments, and each fragment considers itself a church, in contradiction to what

Paul meant when he spoke of the church *in every place*:

Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

(1 Timothy 2:8, ESV, RSV, NASB, see also Malachi 1:11)

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours... Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:2,10)

Christians cannot be a valid witness in any town if they are not united in the same mind and the same judgment, but are instead divided into denominations.³⁹ In his day, Paul could only address one single church in any town or city, such as *the church in Corinth*,⁴⁰ or *the church in Thessalonica*,⁴¹ while today in Chattanooga, for example, there are 750 different churches, each started by a divisive man (or woman!) such as Titus 3:10-11 describes — a self-condemned heretic.⁴² Then they all have nothing more to do with one another, and each calls his own a "local church" when there can only be one *local church*

³⁰ Romans 5:5; Ephesians 1:13 ³¹ John 7:17; 18:36-37; 14:15,21 ³² Proverbs 17:17 ³³ Proverbs 17:17 ³⁴ John 18:36; Matthew 26:52 ³⁵ John 13:35; 17:23 ³⁶ John 17:21 ³⁷ Malachi 3:18 ³⁸ Acts 5:20; Matthew 24:14; John 13:35; 17:23 ³⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 ⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:2 ⁴¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:1 ⁴² By defini-





in each *locality* or *place*, which means *township*, not street corner.

In Acts 20:17, Paul called for the elders of *the* church in Ephesus, not the *churches* in Ephesus. And even thirty to forty years later,⁴³ Yahshua Himself wrote letters to seven churches in seven cities in Asia Minor: to *the* church in Ephesus, and *the* church in Smyrna, etc. There was still only *one* church in each city, where *all the men* were expected to lift holy hands without any wrath or dissension between them, in complete unity as 1 Corinthians 1:10 and 1 Timothy 2:8 require.

This ancient prophecy must be fulfilled:

Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!" ... For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:5,11)

It will certainly not be fulfilled by Christians, but only *disciples*.⁴⁴ All the men in every place (township) are to raise hands without any kind of division.⁴⁵ Yet each denomination looks at the others with varying degrees of suspicion and

contempt, and sometimes downright hostility, and it is considered normal and unavoidable. In the American Civil War, there were great revivals on both sides, as each side prayed for God's help to eliminate the other — literally, to "die by the sword."⁴⁶ Christianity, instead of coming together, has gone to pieces.

The true church will meet the requirements of her Master's petition, and since it did happen in the world in the first century,⁴⁷ it can happen again, as the Master prophesied,⁴⁸ and as it must.⁴⁹ As He prayed, so it will be.⁵⁰

The "church" first appears in Scripture in Acts 2:44 and 4:32, when all who *believed*⁵¹ on Yahshua the Messiah *lived together* and had all things in common. That is what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 5:15: He died for *all*, and *all* who believed no longer lived for themselves but for Him — in one another, in Yahshua's Body on earth, as the witness of who His disciples are,⁵² in order for all to know that the Father sent His Son for this very purpose.⁵³ Only those who *believed* lived together in unity. Only they had eternal life.⁵⁴ He died for *all* so that *all* who live should no longer live for themselves but for the One who died and rose on their behalf⁵⁵ after His suffering in death (*Shelol*)⁵⁶ for three full days and nights⁵⁷ on our behalf.

The true pattern of the church has not changed. Paul, led by the same Spirit, established the churches he founded after the same pattern⁵⁸ as in Act 2:44 and 4:32, and by the same Spirit,⁵⁹ as the same Master prayed in John 17:23 and commanded in John 13:34-35.⁶⁰ *All* who believe and *all* who love Him and *all* who keep His commandments will also live together and have all things in common.⁶¹ It's only common sense among the spiritual, but the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit, since they also can't keep His commandments or love as He commanded.⁶²

For those who considered themselves to be believers, yet were not bearing the fruit, the apostle John provided a litmus test, so that they could judge themselves and have an opportunity to truly believe:

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13, KJV)

Modern translations omit the last phrase, thinking it to be redundant, and therefore missing the point entirely. John wrote this entire letter in hopes of helping some who called themselves *believers* realize that they had not yet passed out

tion, a *heretic* is a person within an organization who holds to an opinion that differs from that organization's stated belief. The term *heretic* cannot accurately be applied to an outsider (1 Cor 5:12-13).⁴³ Revelation 2:4 was about 40 years after Ephesians 6:24⁴⁴ John 13:34-35; 15:8⁴⁵ 1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Corinthians 1:2,10⁴⁶ Matthew 26:52⁴⁷ Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 1 Thessalonians 2:14⁴⁸ Mark 9:11-12⁴⁹ Revelation 19:7-8; Matthew 24:14; John 13:35⁵⁰ John 17:21-23; 1 John 3:22; 5:14-15⁵¹ John 3:16⁵² John 13:34-35⁵³ John 17:21-23⁵⁴ 1 John 3:14,15,23; 5:12-13; Psalm 133⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:15,21; Isaiah 53:10-11⁵⁶ Acts 1:3; 2:24,27,31⁵⁷ Matthew 12:40⁵⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:14; Acts 8:1⁵⁹ Ephesians 4:4-6⁶⁰ Matthew 28:18-20⁶¹ John 3:16; Acts 2:44⁶² 1 Corinthians 16:22; John 14:15,21; 12:25-26; 14:3,18,20,21,23; 1 John 2:4; 1 Corinthians 2:14





of death and into life, so that they could then be truly saved.

The natural man can't understand⁶³ Acts 2:44-45, since they have also not comprehended or understood the gospel and its requirements.⁶⁴ The rich young ruler was condemned by the word spoken to him.⁶⁵

The gospel entails all that the Master commanded and taught His disciples,⁶⁶ including all the so-called "hard sayings."⁶⁷ So who is teaching their converts all that He commanded His disciples? And what did He command them to do? What does the gospel say? What does the gospel mean? What does Revelation 22:17 mean?

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

When the whole nation that Yahshua was speaking of in Matthew 21:43,⁶⁸ the bride of Messiah, empowered by the Holy Spirit, says, "Come! Leave your old life behind, and follow Yahshua the Messiah,"⁶⁹ they and He are not kidding. Yahshua means what He says, and is still saying by the Spirit and the Bride, and so we say, "Come!" (Come means to leave one place and go to another.) "Leave, then, without a cause to keep you from following Him,"⁷⁰ just as the 3000 on the

day of Pentecost who responded to the "many other words" they heard from the apostles.⁷¹

The prophet Malachi prophesied of these days when he wrote:

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. (Mal 3:18)

It was this distinction that Yahshua was speaking of in John 13:35, the infallible witness or proof of who are and who aren't His disciples, manifested in the love of John 13:34. And what is this love? How do you define what His love is?

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. (1 John 3:16)

The way the church was in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 is the only way the church can be — the way it was when it was called "the Way."⁷² But the first church, like the first human beings, fell away. Yet Mark 9:11-12 is prophecy, and the prophet is the Messiah, Yahshua.

And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things." (Mark 9:11-12)

Just as the prophetic voice of John the Baptist prepared the way for Messiah's first coming, so also there would be

a prophetic voice on the earth to restore all things fallen into apostasy in preparation for Messiah's second coming:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse. (Malachi 4:5-6)

At the appointed time, it is written, you [Elijah] are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. (Ecclesiasticus 48:10)

It is too light a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6)

The first church was a community as Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-35 describe, and what Yahshua prayed to His Father for in John 17:21-23 was fulfilled in Acts 4:32, which describes what was the sign of its fulfillment — "the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul." This signified that His Father had heard His prayers, as each one of His disciples was part of that one living sacrifice,⁷³ no longer conformed to the world,⁷⁴ but

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 14:24; Matthew 6:31-32 ⁶⁴ John 7:18; 2 Corinthians 11:15; John 3:36; 1 John 2:4; John 9:41 ⁶⁵ Mark 10:17-22,28-30; John 12:48 ⁶⁶ Matthew 28:20 ⁶⁷ Mark 10:17-22,28-30; 3:31-35; Luke 14:26,33; Matthew 10:37; Mark 8:34-38; Romans 6:2-5; etc. ⁶⁸ 1 Peter 2:9; Isaiah 49:6 ⁶⁹ Genesis 12:1; Mark 8:34-36; John 12:25; 2 Timothy 2:4 ⁷⁰ Mark 10:17-22,28-30 ⁷¹ Acts 2:40-42,44,45; John 13:34-35; 17:10,11,21-23 ⁷² Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22





was *where He is*⁷⁵ — in the Community of the Redeemed,⁷⁶ and devoted to the apostles' teaching.⁷⁷

When the church departed from this original pattern, it was apostate, and unless it is restored to its original pattern and foundation,⁷⁸ Yahshua can never return as He promised He would. The bride can only be made ready,⁷⁹ and the works prepared for her for this purpose⁸⁰ can only be done in the context of the community, which is the Body of which Yahshua is the head.⁸¹ It is characterized by unselfish sharing.⁸²

The apostles' teaching made it clear what love is, and only if God's love had truly been poured into their hearts⁸³ could they love as 1 John 3:14,16,23 describes. The Scriptures prove that "this new life" of Acts 5:20 was possible for those having the gift of the Holy Spirit. But Christians believe it is impossible today, since they are without the Holy Spirit — without the love of God poured out into their hearts. Obviously, the love of John 13:34-35 is impossible, as well as the unity of John 17:23, without the Holy Spirit. This new life is real, practical, and possible when and only when the Spirit that restores all things⁸⁴ is come to the earth again.

Skeptics still wonder, "Is this kind of unity possible?" If this is the kind of

oneness Yahshua prayed for, then He will never be pleased with anything less than what He actually meant as He poured out His heart to His Father, or He would have died and gone into death in vain. He said that death is a place of torment.⁸⁵ He knew what was in store for Him after He would suffer on the cross and die, and go into death where His suffering would increase exponentially.⁸⁶

So that unity He prayed for by the love He commanded His disciples to have for one another must be inevitable. That love and unity that meets the requirements of our Master's petition must be possible, since it has already happened in Acts 4:32-35, and endured as long as the lampstand remained in its place.⁸⁷ Since this has already happened in the first century, in the real world, it is prophesied to happen again after 1900 years of darkness.⁸⁸ Since it happened already in the first century, it must happen again in the last century.⁸⁹

The dry bones will rise from the dead to fulfill the promise made by God to Abraham.⁹⁰ The bride that is making herself ready⁹¹ is not the Christian Church, which is the other woman who will be burned in one hour.⁹²

The restoration of all things in this age⁹³ must bring about Messiah's return⁹⁴ and the restoration in the next

age to fulfill the promise to Abraham.⁹⁵ Elijah's altar of twelve stones⁹⁶ was prophetic of the restoration of the twelve tribes in this age.⁹⁷ The restoration of the twelve tribes, as in Acts 26:7, is the only way the promise to Abraham can be fulfilled — an enemy-free land.⁹⁸ There must be a people who will prove to be Abraham's spiritual offspring by doing as Abraham did.⁹⁹

For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. (Genesis 18:19)

This people will fulfill Malachi 4:6, averting both the utter destruction of the earth and the unthinkable self-destruction of its Creator, for God Himself entered into a self-cursing oath¹⁰⁰ that He would give Abraham's descendants that enemy-free land, which He cannot do unless He has a people who will do as Abraham did, keeping the way of the LORD.

So the church as it was in the first century is the only way it can be to be "the Way." It has to be the way it was when it was called "the Way."¹⁰¹ This is how it began 2000 years ago, and now we must restore it — restore all things fallen in disrepair when the last disciple

⁷³ Romans 12:1-2 ⁷⁴ John 12:25 ⁷⁵ John 12:26 ⁷⁶ Acts 2:44 ⁷⁷ Acts 2:42; Matthew 28:20 ⁷⁸ Acts 2:44; 1 Thessalonians 2:14 ⁷⁹ Revelation 19:7-8 ⁸⁰ Ephesians 2:10; 4:16 ⁸¹ Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:21-22; Revelation 21:3,9,12 ⁸² 1 John 3:14,16,17,23; 5:13 (KJV) ⁸³ Romans 5:5 ⁸⁴ Mark 9:11-12 ⁸⁵ Luke 16:28 ⁸⁶ Acts 2:24,27,31; Luke 16:28 ⁸⁷ Ephesians 6:24; Revelation 2:4 ⁸⁸ Luke 1:78-79; John 9:4 ⁸⁹ Matthew 21:43; 24:14; Isaiah 49:6,8; Malachi 1:11; Matthew 17:10-11; Mark 9:11-12 ⁹⁰ Isa 49:6-8; Acts 26:7-8 ⁹¹ Revelation 19:7-8 ⁹² Revelation 17:3,16-18; 18:8-10 ⁹³ Matthew 21:43; Mark 9:11-12; Matthew 17:10-11; Ecclesiasticus 48:10-11 ⁹⁴ Acts 3:21 ⁹⁵ Isaiah 49:8; Gen 15:18; 18:19; Acts 26:8; Mt 19:28; Romans 11:15 ⁹⁶ 1 Kings 18:30-31 ⁹⁷ Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47; 26:7; Matthew 21:43 ⁹⁸ Genesis 15:18 ⁹⁹ John 8:39 ¹⁰⁰ Genesis 15:8-21; Jeremiah 34:18,20 explains the terms of this kind of covenant. ¹⁰¹ Acts 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22





Yahshua's followers were to be a contrasting society. The contrast would be startling since the whole course of human history is stained by man's red blood. As John F. Kennedy said, "Mankind must put an end to war before war puts an end to mankind." How can this happen? Only by the restoration of the true gospel, which can truly save man from the fatal flaw, producing the true Bride for whom Messiah will return to bring peace to this ravaged earth.

died who had the Holy Spirit. Never again was the Holy Spirit given to anyone during the church's apostasy, as the letter by James to the twelve tribes in the second century describes.¹⁰²

For 1900 years, there has been a shift from community to doctrine. In the first century, the pattern¹⁰³ of the only way the church can be shows us the time when its love and unity was not the result of ecclesiastical manipulation or theological compromise, but from the love of God in the hearts and souls of all who believed.¹⁰⁴ And their devotion to the apostles' teaching¹⁰⁵ showed their obedience to the command He gave to His apostles just before He ascended to His Father in heaven.¹⁰⁶

The authority from Him is the only hope of restoration, which can only be given to those to whom He can entrust it, in order to bring about His commission, which is "too great" for Christians, as it is only for *disciples*. He never commissioned them to go and make *Christians*, but to make *disciples* of all races in the world among the Gentile nations — to make disciples out of them through the teaching of the apostles, to give themselves gladly in sacrificial love and discipleship.

The Christian churches, instead of coming together, have gone into 37,000 pieces, all claiming to be led and taught by the one Spirit.¹⁰⁷ But whose sons are they all?¹⁰⁸

The bride must be prepared before His return.¹⁰⁹ It is inconceivable that Christianity (all who believe in Jesus and are supposedly taught by the one Spirit) in its 37,000 denominations is that bride. Christianity is a tare field which has been gathered into 37,000 bundles.¹¹⁰

The restoration of all things is to rebuild the spiritual and corporeal temple of the church as in Acts 2 and 4. But a lot of rubbish must be cleared away before the building can take place. In the last three or four generations this restoration will take place on earth, for there must be a period of development leading up to it.

This movement will climax in a spectacular demonstration of the love and power of our Master, in His authority, to whom all authority has been given.¹¹¹ When His bride has made herself ready, having put all of His enemies under His feet¹¹² (which is the same as *her* feet, since she is His body¹¹³), Messiah will return for her. That will be the "last day" He spoke of in John 6:39,40,44,54 and in Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 — the end of the evil one's rule upon the earth.¹¹⁴

Great collective movements have risen and changed the whole course of history, such as socialism, communism, Nazism, fascism, the women's movement, the civil rights movement, and now the great conglomerates and multinational groupings. Individual businesses give way to collective conglomerates (such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Lowes, etc.), making ready for the Mark of the Beast. The ecumenical movement is the most deceptive of all movements, including the Jesus movement of the 70s as it swept through every major college campus in the nation and drew many of the brightest young leaders, only to turn them back into the same stagnant ponds of the state's organized religions. Now, in the 21st century, megachurches are gathering in the tens of thousands, like lambs for the slaughter, feeding their emotions with silky-smooth sorceries and a false assurance of cheap salvation while leading them down the broad road to hell.

But the "Restoration of All Things" movement is in its early stages, and is already attracting its potential leaders. The goal is the pure church, reflecting the glory of our Master, like the sun in the kingdom of our Father, united like grains of wheat at the time of harvest. It is the light of the world, which either draws or repels all.¹¹⁵ God is love, the likes of which the world has never seen yet.

It will be when the ecumenical movement is mature that all religions outside its ranks will be called and treated as cults, and eliminated, removed, excluded from

consideration. All who are accused of being in cults, especially the leaders, will have to answer to an ecumenical council for judgment.¹¹⁶ The ecumenical movement will consider as enemies those who leave the Christian churches (who come out of her) to be part of the restoration of the true church. But the truth will always be found outside the camp of organized religion, just as Judaism in the first century did not recognize and receive the Messiah, but had Him crucified.

Our message is Revelation 22:17:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

And Revelation 18:4-5:

"Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

*Come outside the camp of fallen religion, to the place where Messiah lives.*¹¹⁷ You can be sanctified in no other place.¹¹⁸ In no other place can you serve Him except where He is. He is outside the camp of Christianity, just as He was outside the camp of Judaism. But to be *there*, you must bear His reproach, His disgrace.

We are the voice from outside the camp, saying, "Come out of her, My people,"¹¹⁹ and "Go to the place I will show you."¹²⁰ *Come* means to leave one place and go to another place.¹²¹ Only *there*, in that particular set-apart place, where Messiah dwells in His set-apart people,¹²² can worship be offered up in the morning and evening sacrifice,¹²³ where all are without wrath or dissension,¹²⁴ and only *there* can His people (saints=holy ones) be purified¹²⁵ so as to be ready for His return.¹²⁶

Gene Spriggs



Gene and his wife Marsha

¹⁰² James 1:26-27; 2:14-26; etc. ¹⁰³ 1 Thess 2:14; Acts 8:1; 4:32; John 13:34; 17:23 ¹⁰⁴ Acts 2:44; 4:32; John 3:16 ¹⁰⁵ Acts 2:42 ¹⁰⁶ Matt 28:18-20; Acts 16:31-34; 2:38,40,41 ¹⁰⁷ Eph 4:4-6 ¹⁰⁸ Rom 8:14; John 8:44 ¹⁰⁹ Rev 19:7-8; 21:9,12; Eph 5:25-27 ¹¹⁰ Matt 13:24-30,36-43 ¹¹¹ Matt 28:18; 1 Cor 15:24-28 ¹¹² Heb 10:13; Rev 12:1 ¹¹³ Col 1:18,24 ¹¹⁴ 1 John 5:19; Rev 11:15; 19:11-21 ¹¹⁵ John 13:35; 3:18 ¹¹⁶ Heb 13:13 ¹¹⁷ John 12:26; Heb 13:12-13 ¹¹⁸ 1 Cor 1:2 ¹¹⁹ Rev 18:4 ¹²⁰ Gen 12:1 ¹²¹ 1 Cor 1:2; Mal 1:5,11; John 12:26 ¹²² John 14:2-3,18,20,23; 2 Cor 6:16-18 ¹²³ Rom 12:1 ¹²⁴ 1 Tim 2:8, ESV, RSV, NASB ¹²⁵ 1 Cor 1:2; 1 John 3:1-3; Rev 19:7-8 ¹²⁶ Heb 10:13

A Few Years Back

I remember the day I made Katrina Strickland cry. I couldn't understand why she was crying. "What is her problem?" I thought. She said I was so mean and made her feel so bad about herself. I didn't see what she was talking about at all. But inside, for some reason, I still felt awful. I tried to get her to stop. It was right in the middle of our Environmental Science class; everyone was staring, wondering what was going on, what I had done. She wouldn't stop, or couldn't. She was young and innocent. She just kept sobbing, saying, "You're so mean, Mike, you're so mean."

That was one of the first times I can remember coming face to face with something inside of me that was hurtful to others. I sat in that old wooden school desk, looking down at the carvings and messages from decades earlier, scratched in the cloudy laminate top, then back at Katrina, a very nice girl, tears streaming down her face. I was helpless. A sting of guilt bit down somewhere deep inside of me, like the first time I lied to my parents — that gnawing, empty panic. I was face to face with the painful fruit of my insensitivity, my selfishness. I was fifteen years old.

Time does not discriminate. Its effects on our minds, bodies, and surroundings become more evident with each passing year. As I grew older and my personal experiences multiplied, I would meet that fatal flaw within me time and time again. Though often naïve to how I caused pain in others, the pain was real. The tears were real. The anger was real. There is a certain deep frustration, a hopeless soul scream that comes when the ingrained, hurtful ways of two people in a relationship clash, neither of them able to see his own fault. Pride draws the battle lines, humility flees and, unwilling to yield, you close the gates around your heart and lash out, blaming others for everything that is wrong.



Though young, in the prime of my youth, and coming from a good family, I was being effectively trained to live for myself, sever ties with any who would call attention to my personal faults, and try to satisfy an ever-increasing desire for pleasure. The pride in my soul was being built up like an ancient walled city, which I thought was impenetrable. Shockingly, this was all happening in the background of my life without me knowing. I was completely unaware of the change that was taking place in me. My experiences and choices were forming my character. I had no idea how deep these poor choices would drive the roots of loneliness into the most secluded recesses of my soul.

Poets talk about love. Prophets talk about forgiveness. But who can heal what paralyzes a man's soul? I entered Montevallo University in the fall of 1994 with a full scholarship. I hadn't given much thought to college. I knew that was what you did after high school, but I didn't know why. I had gone reluctantly, mainly to satisfy my parents' desire for me to succeed. I really had nothing better to do. With my lack of determination and enthusiasm about my opportunity at the university, I had effectively become the antithesis of everything my parents had worked so hard for me to be: the product of a society that taught me to assess each and every situation

based on how it affected me, never considering how my actions affected others. As the sun sank behind the pine-dotted piedmont, I hugged my mother, shook my father's hand, and watched silently as they got into their car and drove away.

Those Days

I can still remember that first night, laying flat on my back in bed, staring at the ceiling of my dorm room, and then beyond into a silent world of wondering. The iron bed frame resembled something from a World War II hospital, with peeling paint, rusty tones, springs squeaking with every movement, as if they were expressing their happiness that some poor character was gracing them again, giving them purpose. There I lay, half awake, half asleep. My eyes grew heavy. I slipped into a raft of retrospection and drifted down a mental stream, watching, as past events that formed my character manifested themselves on the foggy banks of my memory. Some were shockingly grotesque. Some pleasant, bringing me a measure of comfort. Eventually I slept.

Next to gravity and love, peer pressure is one of the most powerful forces on earth. As the days ensued I began to make friends and get introduced to the collegiate social life. It didn't take long to realize that there was a stark difference between high school and college — there was no parental restraint anymore. Parties were abundant, relationships came and went like cars during rush hour on America's superhighways, social taboos that no one likes to talk about were displayed openly in an atmosphere of "anything goes." Eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds, completely cut loose, and laden only with the burden of how to spend all their parents' money. For me, it was an emotional head-on collision with the real world, and I was not prepared for the consequences.

Several weeks passed. Despair bit, and began to slowly inject its lethal

venom. I grew distant and hopeless. My dormitory was like a prison to me. One night I sat in the eerie shadows of my expensive cell, nervous with depression. I decided to call my mother. Hoping for a way out of my growing sadness, and sensing that the future held nothing better for me, I begged to quit college. "I... I don't think that I can make it, Mom... I don't know what to say except... something bad is going to happen if I stay in the place... It's not gonna be good."

Looking back, I can't image the turmoil that my mother must have experienced that night. Through great difficulty they had raised me, agonizing as I stumbled through my youth, hoping and praying that God would somehow have mercy on their son and get him through to the other side. Now here I was at college, that pinnacle, that shining emerald city that all Americans live to enter, that great gateway to the rest of your life... and all I wanted was a way out. "Son, can you please just try to finish out the year? For me? For dad? Please... for us... for us, son."

Her words were like a death sentence. I knew my mother couldn't understand what I was about to experience. It was not her fault. I hung up the phone, fingers claspng the cord as I slid down to the floor. Sitting in darkness, I quietly wept.

Resignation

When hopelessness sets in, people become dangerous. They are a threat not only to themselves, but to any whom they come in contact with. There is a final boundary in each person's conscience. If crossed over, there can be no return to one's humanity. The resignation of my will brought me close to that boundary. I could see the other side with crystal clarity. There was no regret there. I wondered whether the pain would stop if I crossed over. Yet something held me back — some invisible restraint that I could not define.

I was nineteen, with a fake ID, and nothing left to cause me to care. I had moved off campus by this time,

and lived in an old farmhouse on the outskirts of town. My bedroom had become a studio, strewn with canvases, number ten cans filled with turpentine, brushes, and a mattress on the floor. The strong odor of solvents blurred the line between fantasy and reality, helping me cope with my growing depression. My living room

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had a single burnt-orange polyester couch that faced an old Thermolaire gas heater where a fireplace had once been. I painted pictures of that old Thermolaire over and over again. Somehow it brought me comfort. To me it represented a better time, when people worked hard, a time when uprightness and integrity were the mores. Sometimes I would daydream of the people who had inhabited the house long before me, imagining that they had been good, honest people. Though I knew nothing about possessing these qualities, somewhere deep inside, I desired them.

By this time, my fatal flaw of

selfishness was beginning to slowly drive me insane. I couldn't stand being alone. It was like death. Yet my selfishness drove anyone away who tried to get close. I was in a double prison of loneliness, peering out from behind the bars of my own sin.

It was January. I had an old brown corduroy coat that I had bought at a thrift store. Wrapping it tight, I tried to block the sting of the winter wind as I scuffled behind the house and down to the old baseball field. The air was crisp and gray. The grass looked as if someone had sucked up the color and stored it away until spring. A surreal cloud formation enveloped my view, as if to confirm my sadness. Everything was melancholy, and there was no sound of life. The sting of Jack Daniels lasted only a second, until the warm feeling came. There I sat on cold metal bleachers, wondering why I was alive... wondering if anyone cared... wondering if I cared.

With the bottle high in the air, I finished the last bit. My pain was eased, but my guilt was still there. The whiskey wasn't working. Nothing was working. Like a walking corpse, I managed to make my way through the fog and into the sanctuary of my truck. I fumbled for the keys, eased down the clutch, and managed to start her. As if I had been introduced as a character into the next scene of some spooky horror flick, the low burbling haunt of Jimmy Smith's Hammond B-3 organ broke the silence and began to wail in



the background. My life had become a nightmare and I couldn't wake up. I shifted into first and drove out into the country, trying to somehow escape my circumstances. Down the north-central Alabama dirt-road labyrinth I went... fleeing... faster. Perhaps I could escape. Maybe I could run away. Then, the tentacles of guilt emerged. From my innermost being they came, wrapping themselves firmly around my mind, choking any hope I ever had of breaking free from my self-made hell. My thoughts were overpowering me.

The truck whooshed through the evergreen landscape. Puffs of red clay dust that had seen generations of farmers and country people come and go, danced and swirled, testifying to my impending doom. Suddenly, time stopped. I drove over a ravine and everything slowed to a crawl. A dreamlike sequence began to take place. In an instant, a million thoughts entered into me and waged war in my mind. I was suspended high above a ravine on an old wooden bridge. The siren song of suicide called out enchantingly from the rocks below. "Come," they said, "come." I wondered if by jerking the wheel, plunging myself into the rocks, it would cause the madness to stop. I just wanted everything to stop!

Then something like a voice came forth from a part of me I never knew was there. Something that had been dormant. "I need God!" I screamed with tears streaming down my face, as if somewhere deep down I knew that was my only hope. I didn't want to die. That wasn't the way out. But then, with the same intensity, the crushing specter of hopelessness came and stood over me. As a victor stands over its defeated foe, it taunted me, spitting in my face and laughing arrogantly. There was nothing I could do. I had been here before. I was terrified. At that moment, I realized I had slit the wrists of my willpower. I had given myself over to something

more powerful than me — something that I had not imagined had such consequences. My desperation yielded to defeat. In silence I drove on.

In a world that is driven by self-indulgence, how can you not be hurt? How can you trust without being devoured? How can you be real and still protect yourself? In those days, my



The siren song of suicide called out enchantingly from the rocks below. "Come," they sang, "come."

art became my only god, my only sense of comfort and release. I sketched the Thermolaire again. In the notebook next to it I wrote: *If I ever look back and read this when I'm older, I'll know that I made it somehow.* I had stopped going to parties. Though many sought me out, I had become a living dead man, entombed in my house, slowly drinking and painting myself into oblivion, only leaving to drive the back roads, or get more whisky.

One day, I managed to get out of the house for a while. I drove down Highway 25, past the gypsum mine where virtually everything had become white from the trucks spilling their goods. There were the tall metal stacks, billowing their plumes of puffy white smoke high above. There were the hard-working black men who always

waived to me when I drove by. They smiled at me and always said, "Yes, Sir," when we talked. They were good men, honest men, hard-working men. Better men that I could ever dream to be, and yet they called me "Sir." I felt so humiliated by their respect and kindness toward me — an arrogant, ungrateful, rich kid who never had to work a day in his life.

As I drove, I noticed a small dirt road I hadn't seen before. I turned in and climbed the windy, worn path through the southern pine forest. Up I went until the trees opened for me and revealed a panoramic view of the valley below me. I parked. Surrounding me were old, weather-beaten headstones, barely legible from the years of handiwork that the elements had done to them. THUNK... I closed my door and walked to the nearest one, brushing away the collection of dust and dirt. *Roger Campbell, 1845-1864.*

He was only nineteen... the same age as me.

I walked from one tomb to another, reading the ancient epithets. I was hit with the weight of the loss of life. These boys must have all died in the Civil War. My thoughts began to drown me in a sea of emotion as I thought about the deaths of thousands, of untold millions throughout history. Then, the lens of my subconscious pointed back at me. I stood high above the landscape, perched in the midst of tombs. The dead were my only companions. Somehow, I felt as if these departed souls could understand. But was I any better off than they were? Perhaps I was worse, since I was still alive, but not living for anything. They had died with a purpose, but I had no purpose. "GOD... PLEASE HELP ME!!!... IF YOU'RE THERE, PLEASE HELP ME!!!!!" I screamed at the top of my lungs. I paused, panting, out of breath, but with a sense that, for the first time ever, I had been heard by someone, though I did not know who.

That day I dropped out of college.

I didn't immediately tell my parents, because I knew they wouldn't understand. I could not go on, however, yielding to an institutional vampire that was sucking the very life out of me, turning me into a husk of a man. My fatal flaw of selfishness, combined with the parasitic social life of the university system, was destroying the last vestige of my humanity. There was only a trace left. Somehow, I had to hold on.

The Night is Over

When writing a memoir, you reflect back, very subjectively, on events and people that affected you. Though I have spent countless hours contemplating how I broke free long enough to leave college and hit the road, I still cannot articulate it completely. The summer of 1995 was hot and humid. The heat pulsed, wrapping its broad arms around me, squeezing me as I walked down a road that seemed more like a griddle. I had managed to unearth a small magazine in my closet back home, which was written by a group of people who lived communally. I wasn't sure what that meant, but I was curious enough to pay them a visit. Deep down, I must have hoped that they might hold some answer to my quest for purpose.

I arrived in Harrisonburg at the beginning of August. It was beautiful there — a quaint town nestled in the lap of the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains. Green grass and trees as far as you could see. Road-worn and dirty, I stood at the front door and knocked. I was greeted by a smiling middle-aged woman and welcomed into the large two-story brick home. I sat down on a couch in the living room, caressed by the cool breeze that the mahogany ceiling fan was creating above. Children and adults started pouring into the room I was in. I was greeted by everyone and treated like some long-lost friend, though I knew no one. They prevailed upon me to stay with them. "Why so much interest in me?" I wondered. No one knew me. No one knew how filthy my life was. Strangely, no one seemed to care.

As the days wore on, I was

astonished at the love and kindness that I witnessed between everyone who lived in this community. I asked how they could live this way, why they showed any interest in a person as impure as I was. When I heard the answer, I was hardly prepared for it. They told me that they had been like I was, but they had met someone who showed them a way of escape. His name was Yahshua, the Son of God. They told me the true Son of God had the power to save a person from his guilt completely, bringing him

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into a home, not sending him on his way to continue to fend for himself in a hostile world. This was starkly different from the message I had heard from Christianity — one that caused me to despise religion. No, this message had hope, because I could see with my eyes the kindness and love between everyone who was there. They were not living for themselves. They were living for each other. It was like nothing I had ever seen.

Finally, after being persuaded that Yahshua could save even me, I went down to a river, accompanied by the entire community. I went into the water, looked up to heaven, and cried out from the deepest chamber of my soul. I had been enslaved to my destructive desires and self-centered passions my entire life. I had destroyed other people's hopes, dashed their dreams, stolen their desire to be decent people. I had robbed people of their innocence and slashed their purity. I was guilty. I deserved to die. I screamed with everything in me to be completely cleansed from my sin and guilt, wanting a new life, wanting to be free from my inner prison. And I was.

That was eleven years ago. What happened that day plunged me into a full-time life and a community of people who live completely for their God and for each other. I can say honestly that I have been cleansed from my sin and the corruption that was eating into me like a spiritual cancer. I am continuing to be healed of the fatal flaw that almost destroyed me. Now, unity has taken the place of division. A healing balm has covered over the wounds of self-destruction. Peace and true satisfaction have replaced a life of nervous strife to get ahead and enjoy myself as much as possible before death knocked on my door.

Not long ago, I was thumbing through some old papers. I came upon a notebook that looked familiar. It was old, stained, dusty. As I turned the pages, my eyes rested upon an image. I could hardly believe it. It was the sketch of my old Thermolaire heater. My scribble was still there, stating some hopeful prophecy that one day I might make it. I shook. I broke down and wept. Hands in my face, I sobbed, "I made it!" But never could I have imagined what that could have meant.

Today, I am a living testimony of hope. Not just to get off drugs. Not just to stop drinking. Not even to simply have a better life. No. A hope so much deeper than those superficial things. A hope that the innermost part of a man, the part of our soul that is cursed with a fatal flaw, one that has more potential to destroy than an arsenal of nuclear weapons, can be stitched and healed and replaced with the ability to trust and love. It may be hard to believe, but there is a way out of the madness. There is hope.

Michael



Quiet Desperation

“Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.”

—Henry David Thoreau, 1854

The headline grabbed my attention like an electric shock.

A Tennessee minister's wife admitted that she had shot her husband in the back with a shotgun, killing him, and then fled with their three small daughters. Matthew and Mary Winkler had seemed to have the ideal family. He was the popular, charismatic pastor of a conservative evangelical church, and his wife appeared to be the perfect wife and mother, with sweet, affectionate children. There were no outward signs of discord in the family. Their grieving congregation was baffled as to why this quiet, kind woman would do such a thing. Her quiet desperation found a lethal voice to express itself.

Somehow, although I had no personal connection to this tragedy, it deeply affected me. I was short of breath, and my stomach seemed to be tied in knots. I, too, had once been a pastor with a faithful wife and three small daughters. I could not imagine my wife having done such a thing, and I shuddered to think of the devastation it would have caused in the souls of my precious children.

Surely, there had been something deep in the hearts of Matthew and Mary Winkler toward one another when they were married. Surely, they believed that God was putting them together, and that He would help them to have a happy marriage and raise godly offspring. Yet ten years



Marriage often becomes more of a duel than a duet because of the fatal flaw at work in both of the partners

later, their marriage and his life came to such a dreadful end. Why? The fatal flaw of the human race took its deadly toll.

I don't pretend to know what caused Mary Winkler to become so desperate that she would kill her husband, but I am well acquainted with how the fatal flaw of humanity has worked in my life, and threatened to destroy my own marriage and family. My wife and I were married almost 26 years ago, with the zealous expectation of being urban

missionaries to bring the good news to the Boston inner city. Ten years later, we were adrift in the godless world of high-tech professionals traveling

the world in search of something to distract us from the disappointments of our life. The “quick charge” of seminary had quickly been drained by a religious system that was disconnected from the source of divine power to overcome the fatal flaw of the human race.

Church after church, the players were different, but the play was essentially the same, always ending in division, heartache, hard feelings, and disillusionment. We did not understand why good-hearted

people who all believed in Jesus and claimed to be following Him, could not get along with each other, or why they seemed to have

The “quick charge” of seminary had quickly been drained by a religious system that was disconnected from the source of divine power to overcome the fatal flaw of the human race.

such a shallow interest in the Word of God, or why the perverse pleasures of the world kept creeping into the church. Burnt out, we bailed out of church work, and took the opportunity of some lucrative consulting jobs in Switzerland to get a change of scenery. Not wanting to be heathen, we kept going to church, but our zeal had run out. We joined the ranks of the passive pew-sitters we had always despised.

Truth be known, we were just as fallen and needy as anyone else, even



though our upbringing had equipped us with the stability and sophistication to maintain a good outward appearance. We were both leading lives of quiet desperation, superficial in our communication with each other, each tormented by our own besetting sins, inadvertently hurting each other through our inherited tendencies, and becoming hopeless and bitter over the unrealized expectations of our marriage.

Oh, don't get me wrong; we weren't thinking murderous thoughts about each other. We loved each other, but somehow we were powerless to overcome the fatal flaw that hindered us from seeing past our own "rights" and selfish desires. So each hurtful or insensitive word, action, or inaction pushed our souls further apart, though we continued to live together in a semblance of peace. Why hadn't our Savior given us the power to live the victorious Christian life we had read so much about?

In June of 1990, a shocking thought occurred to me. Perhaps I was not truly saved. In the 14 years I had been a Christian, I had never doubted my salvation. After all, I had said the sinner's prayer, asked Jesus into my heart, and become a zealous Christian leader. I had left my immoral life behind. I had abandoned my former career aspirations and gone to seminary to become an inner-city missionary, Bible teacher, and house-church pastor. But finally, the painful truth overtook me. When I looked myself squarely in the eyes, I knew that I didn't have the power to overcome the fatal flaw that afflicts all of humanity. No matter how many times I repented and rededicated my life to Christ, or how much I prayed, or how many Christian books I read, I was still a prisoner to

the power of sin.

This realization left me in utter despair, for there was absolutely nothing I could do about my condition. How much more "saved" could I get? I had believed all the right things, I had said all the right words in total sincerity, but there was a "disconnect" somewhere. I could

No matter how many times I repented and rededicated my life to Christ, or how much I prayed, or how many Christian books I read, I was still a prisoner to the power of sin.

not reach His saving power. How much longer could I go on in my quiet desperation? From the depths of my soul I cried out to the God I hoped was really there, to have mercy on me and show me His salvation.

A few weeks later, we were back in Boston trying frantically to sell our old house so that we could settle down in Switzerland. About a week before we were due to fly back, a man came with his fiancée to look at our house. He had heard about it from an old friend



of mine, and thought it might suit him and his wife-to-be after they were married. But alas, it was too much house for him. I stood on the front porch watching them leave, my heart sinking as the hope dwindled of being free of this burden that represented our past ten years of bitter disappointment. Just as they were about to

get in their car and drive off, the man noticed the anxiety in my eyes. He walked back to where I was standing and said, "If you really need someone to take care of your house, you should talk to those people at that community just a few blocks from here — you know, the Twelve Tribes. They're really nice, and they might be interested in your house."

A peculiar sense of destiny settled over me as I watched them drive off. I had never met anyone from this community before, but I had passed by their house many times, and wondered what they were about. In fact, only a few days earlier, I had noticed one of their pleasant women, with characteristic long hair and modest apparel, at the little market where we got our fruit and vegetables.

So the next morning found me knocking on their door, which opened to reveal a clean and simply furnished house with a penetrating aura of wholesomeness and peace. Somehow I had the feeling that I had come home. With a warm smile, the woman who answered the door excused herself to look for a man about my age whom she said would be happy to talk with me.

Over the course of the next week, my wife and I spent a lot of time talking with these gentle and unpretentious people, and reading the "freepapers" they gave us. We had so many questions, which they patiently



Why hadn't our Savior given us the power to live the victorious Christian life we had read so much about?

answered, and at the end of that week, we happily handed them the keys to our house, confident that they would take good care of it while we were in Switzerland. They urged us to visit their sister community in the southwest corner of France, and we were very much inclined to do so.

There was something fresh and exciting about the way these people understood the Scriptures and God's plan in redemption. They called the Son of God by His Hebrew name, Yahshua, and said they had all literally given up everything to follow Him. They lived together, worked together, worshiped together — they were always together.

They said that was the normal life of a disciple, the result of obeying the gospel, and the fulfillment of all that the prophets had spoken about the New Covenant.

Over the next few weeks, after putting our children to bed at night, we read aloud through the gospels and the Book of Acts together in the light of all we had just seen and heard. We were amazed and disturbed by how the Savior's words had been ignored, trivialized, or explained away by Christians, robbing them of their power. We saw how the gospel had been reduced from a radical call to utterly abandon one's former life and possessions to little more than an offer of a free ticket to heaven. No wonder that gospel had no power to save us from the fatal flaw that afflicts all of humanity!

We took the first opportunity to visit the Community in Sus, France, staying a week with them in October 1990. What we experienced there changed

the course of our life forever. It was a large community of about 150 people of all ages, races, and many nationalities, living together in unity. They gathered every morning and evening



All the community members were laboring joyfully, not for themselves, but to serve their brothers and sisters, which was to them serving their King, Yahshua the Messiah.

to sing and express whatever was in their hearts, pray, and share a meal together. Between these gathering times, they would work together at their various occupations, whether farming, building, teaching children, cooking, baking bread, cleaning, washing clothes, sewing, fixing vehicles, or selling their wares in the village markets. All were laboring joyfully, not for themselves, but to serve their brothers and sisters, which was to them serving their King, Yahshua the Messiah. On Friday evening, they gathered at sunset to celebrate the Sabbath with music, Israeli-style folk dancing, and a festive meal, followed by a day of rest. The peace and harmony of it all was overwhelming.

By midweek, I was undone. The words of truth I'd heard and the contrast between my selfish, independent life and this selfless life of love and unity humbled me to the point that I could no longer maintain my composure. I remember sitting on the bed in the simple but comfortable quarters of a large family that had gladly moved into an old bus to make room for our visit. I opened my Bible and my eyes fell on this passage:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

I began to weep uncontrollably as I recognized myself in those words. They described not my former life, but my current life perfectly. I was still dead in my trespasses and sins in which I currently walked according to the course of this world. I was still under the power of the prince of this world, living in the lusts of my flesh, indulging its desires, a self-deceived son of disobedience. There was no denying it, and I could no longer excuse it because I had encountered a people who were not walking according to the course of this world. They were actually being delivered from the fatal flaw of the human race. Obviously, they had come to know the true Savior.

Returning reluctantly to Switzerland, I resigned my job and we settled our affairs as quickly as possible, bidding farewell to our shocked friends. A small delegation from the Community in Sus came up to help us, and on November 25, 1990, my faithful



wife and I surrendered our lives in the icy waters of Lake Geneva, crying out to Yahshua to save us, not just from our past sins, but from the power of sin. Our quiet desperation had found a voice, and our desperate cry was heard in heaven.

Perhaps you will expect me to end this story with, "And we all lived happily ever after." Indeed, we are happy, though it is such a shallow word to describe our life. Joy is a much better word, for it transcends the ups and downs of our flighty emotions. It was said of our Master Yahshua,

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9)

Ours is a life of learning to love righteousness and hate wickedness, and our joy is proportional to our progress along the way of our Master. We walk on this way together, and the grace to overcome the fatal flaw inherent in our fallen humanity comes to us

through our brothers and sisters, whom we live with 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This is because the love of God has truly been poured into our hearts, which is the Holy Spirit, the Helper, whom the world does not know. His love causes us to gently penetrate the walls of defensiveness and pretense we all tend to put up, and speak the truth to each other about the hurtful ways in our lives. And our love for Him causes us to receive the ministry of His Spirit through our brothers, confessing and repenting of our sins. The covenant we are in together, to never leave or forsake each other, gives us the security to be real, knowing we will not be rejected. Love and forgiveness are healing us.

I shudder to think where I and my family would be today if our Father had not heard our cry and shown us His Salvation. Rather than the destruction that awaited us because of the fatal flaw, we have experienced the lovingkindness of our Father through His people. Our lives are full of purpose and we are surrounded by faithful friends. Our daughters are growing up to be godly young women who love the way of our Master Yahshua and have joined us in this



Tabitha's Place, Sus, France

covenant. And my wife and I have a deepening friendship and a confident hope for the future. We are eternally grateful that we could trade in our lives of quiet desperation for the abundant life of our Master Yahshua.

This abundant life reveals a secret that has been hidden for almost two thousand years, and like many best-kept secrets, it has been hidden in plain sight — in everyone's favorite verse of the New Testament:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

The key is in the word *believes* and how it is connected to the word *life*, for...

All who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

Indeed, whoever truly *believes* the gospel that our Master and His

apostles preached *will* have eternal life, and that *life* is described in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-35, where it says definitively what *all* who *believe* will do. Eternal life doesn't begin in heaven

after you die. It begins now, here on earth, as soon as you *believe* as the first disciples believed. That kind of belief produces the abundant life of true salvation.

There is another kind of belief that does not produce this life:

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all men...

(John 2:23-24)

This is the way we had "believed" all those years, but Yahshua could not entrust Himself to us until we truly entrusted ourselves to Him by abandoning our life in this world and surrendering our lives into the hands of His Body, the community where He lives in His people. Only *there* could we serve Him — where He is.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also... (John 12:25-26)

With all of our hearts, we desire to extend this real salvation to you — the end to your quiet desperation. Please come and visit us. Our addresses are on the back cover of this paper.



David

JEPHTHAH'S



DAUGHTER

²⁹ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah... ³⁰ And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, ³¹ whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

³² Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands... ³⁴ When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was his only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter.

³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break."

³⁶ "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites."

³⁷ So she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions."

³⁸ So he said, "Go." Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed,

she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. ³⁹ And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made.

(Judges 11:29-39)

THIS TRAGIC STORY has troubled Christians and Jews alike for thousands of years. Countless commentaries have attempted to explain away the haunting specter of Jephthah killing his precious only child and offering her up as a burnt offering. They say it was a rash¹ vow, which God would not expect Jephthah to literally fulfill. Surely God wouldn't condone human sacrifice! *Would He?*

Jephthah's "Rash" Vow

Consider how the story begins, "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah... and Jephthah made a vow to the Lord." How then could it have been a rash vow unless we are ready to accuse God Himself of being rash? But why would the Spirit of God inspire a man to make such a vow? And what kind of young woman was Jephthah's daughter to willingly give herself to such a fate? These are very deep questions whose answers touch the very foundation of God's eternal purpose for mankind.

While it is doubtful that Jephthah expected his daughter to be what would come first out of his house when he returned from battle, considering his reaction when he saw her, neither can it be assumed that he was confident it would be a sheep or a goat instead. God chose Jephthah because of his heart, knowing that he would withhold nothing from Him, not even his only child. And when His Spirit came upon Jephthah to deliver Israel from being snuffed out as a nation, Jephthah's response confirmed why he was chosen. He would give anything to secure the victory, and God saw fit to test him. Does that remind you of someone else?

¹ After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." ...

⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."

¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:1,2,9-12)

There can be no doubt that Abraham was actually in motion to take his son's life, being fully persuaded that his God was able to raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill His promise.² But God did not require it of him, providing instead a ram for the burnt offering. It was a great test, and Abraham passed the test. So why did God not provide a substitute for Jephthah's daughter? He wanted to teach us something very important about vows, about love, and about a willing sacrifice.

Jephthah had made a vow to his God, and a vow is not to be broken:

If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Numbers 30:2)

There is an old and true expression that very few people in this day and age understand: *A man is only as good as his word.* Gone are the days when men could have confidence in an oral agreement sealed merely by a handshake. Today, words are cheap and carry little weight unless they are backed up by a written legal contract, and that with economic teeth behind it. But God does not change, nor will He forget a single word that we speak:

"I tell you, on the Day of Judgment men will give account for every careless [inactive, useless] word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37)

¹ Rash — done impulsively, without careful consideration. ² Hebrews 11:17-19

The sobering truth is that a man's worth is measured by his faithfulness to keep his word, for he is made in the image of the One whose word is true and unchangeable.³ A man who breaks his word misrepresents his Creator and undermines the very foundations of human civilization. This understanding escapes modern man, but it was not lost on Jephthah... or on his daughter.

For Jephthah to shrink back from fulfilling his vow would have broken something in the core of his being. It was not a matter of his own personal pride, but of the very fabric of his humanity, and not only his, but also the integrity of his people. Even his great love for his daughter could not nullify his vow to his God.

Jephthah's daughter was a completely willing sacrifice. She did not whimper or bemoan the outcome of her father's vow. Who is like unto her? The Bible does not record her name, and she would be content just to be identified by her father's name. But we will call her *Ishshah*, a Hebrew word that means both *woman* and *burnt offering*.

Ishshah did not consider her own life to be worth more than her father's integrity. She loved him more than her own life. To shrink back from giving up her life to enable him to fulfill his vow would break something in the core of her being. She would not be able to go on living. Even her request for two months' time to "weep over her virginity" was not for her own personal loss, but for grief over the fact that she would not be able to give him grandchildren. It was there that she found her identity as a woman — to raise up godly offspring and pour her life into them — and once she had closed that door in her heart, she presented herself to her father to give her life as a burnt offering.

Jephthah proved to be a true son of Abraham who trained up his daughter in the way of the LORD, and Ishshah proved to be a daughter who had received her father's heart. She would withhold nothing from him, just as he would withhold nothing from his God. What was the significance of her short life? Why is this short and seemingly tragic story preserved for us?



God's "Rash" Vow

There is another Father who made a grave vow, which if He did not fulfill it, would result in the literal ripping apart of His very being. It was God Himself, and His vow was to Abraham:

⁷ *And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."*

⁸ *But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"*

⁹ *He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other...¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him...*

¹⁷ *When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites." (Genesis 15:7-21)*

What was the significance of this peculiar animal sacrifice? How did it answer Abram's question, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" The shocking solution to this puzzle is found in a passage far away in the prophecy of Jeremiah:

And the men who transgressed My covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before Me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts... I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. (Jeremiah 34:18,20)

This passage shows the terms of a very serious kind of covenant, something that was understood by the ancient Hebrews. The initiator of this kind of covenant would pass between the halves of an animal split in two, saying by that action, "May it happen to me just as to this animal if I do not keep my promise."

In other words, God answered Abram's question by saying, "If I do not give your descendants this land, may the fate of these animals come upon Me." God Himself would be torn asunder! It is no exaggeration to say that the fate of the universe is at stake in what happens to this land.

So considering what is at stake, why hasn't God already fulfilled His promise? Some might say, "What's the big deal? The Jews are already back on their land!" Well, for one thing, take a closer look at the boundaries. The Jews are occupying only a small portion of that promised land, and it seems rather unlikely that they are going to gain the rest of it anytime soon, by force of arms or any other means. But even if they or their allies conquered the entire Arab world and seized their land, still it would not be the blessing of God, for God, who does not change, has made it very clear what is required of Abraham and his descendants in order for Him to give them the land:

For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has promised him. (Genesis 18:19)

The Bible records very clearly that Abraham's descendants after Jacob

³ Psalm 119:160; John 17:17

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

did *not* do this. They rebelled and gave themselves to all manner of idolatry, injustice, and wickedness. Because of their disobedience, God could never deliver the entire land into their hands, and even had to drive them out of the portion they once possessed, swearing that He would not bring them back to the land until...⁴

“... you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul...” (Deuteronomy 30:2)

No one who knows anything about how the Jews got back to Palestine, and what their moral and spiritual life is like there, can be under any illusion as to what force is sustaining them. It is certainly not God’s blessing on account of their national repentance and righteousness! No, it will take something of an entirely different nature to enable this heavenly Father to fulfill His vow. It will take a *woman* like Jephthah’s daughter. It will take an *Ishshah* — a willing burnt offering.

The Daughter of Zion

That is why Israel is so often called the “daughter of Zion” in the Scriptures,⁵ and the church, as the spiritual Israel, is characterized as a virgin betrothed to Messiah.⁶ There is a purity of devotion, a self-sacrificing quality, that is so pleasing in a woman who finds her identity in serving her father or husband. That is an unpopular point of view today, but, like it or not, it is clearly the viewpoint of the Bible. Our heavenly Father has always desired a people for His own possession who would be like a pure virgin daughter to Him, to be prepared as a bride for His Son, Yahshua⁷ the Messiah. And just as He willingly gave up His life as a sacrifice for her, she also must willingly give up her life for Him, to bring about His Father’s will on the earth.

This is not just the pretty symbolic language of the Scriptures, but must be the practical reality of every disciple’s life. The apostle Paul understood this

and continually called the first-century believers to this standard:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

They were each to daily⁸ present their individual bodies as one corporate sacrifice, as one *Ishshah*, to bring about the will of their Father. If anyone is



not willing to present himself in total surrender, it shows that he is not ready to have communion with Him.

Paul made it clear in his defense before King Agrippa that their *reasonable service* had everything to do with bringing about God’s promise to Abraham:

And now it is for the hope of the promise made by God to our forefathers that I stand here on trial, which promise our twelve tribes, by devotedly serving Him day and night, hope to see fulfilled for them. It is for this hope, your Majesty, that I am accused by the Jews. (Acts 26:6-7)

By “our twelve tribes” Paul meant the church, the spiritual Israel that was being raised up largely from among the Gentiles, to be a light to all nations, showing them the fruit of being truly

connected to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul knew all too well that Abraham’s physical descendants had not produced that fruit, and therefore what Yahshua had said to the religious leaders in Jerusalem had come upon them:

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” (Matthew 21:43)

That *nation* to whom the kingdom would be given would be the fulfillment of this prophecy of Isaiah, which Paul applied to his life’s work:⁹

He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)

The “You” here is the Messiah, and His Body, the twelve tribe spiritual Israel¹⁰ that He would raise up through His twelve apostles, to be a light to the nations so that His salvation would reach the ends of the earth. But if you look two verses later, you will see the *purpose* of the restoration of a twelve tribe spiritual nation:

Thus says the LORD, “In a favorable time I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You; and I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, to restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages.” (Isaiah 49:8)

This new spiritual Israel must bear the fruit that old Israel did not bear, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets¹¹ for them (including Genesis 18:19, quoted above), so as to move Abraham’s physical offspring to jealousy,¹² ultimately bringing a remnant of them to repentance.¹³ This will release their God to righteously give them their desolate heritage in the next age,¹⁴ the enemy-free land He promised to Abraham, so that God Himself is not cursed along with the land.¹⁵

Sadly, just as old Israel, the new spiritual Israel that came to birth in the

⁴ Please see all of Deut. ch. 28-30 for the full context. ⁵ Zephaniah 3:14; Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5; and dozens of other references. ⁶ 2 Corinthians 11:2 ⁷ See page 47 for an explanation of the name *Yahshua* ⁸ Luke 9:23; Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 15:31; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25 ⁹ Acts 13:47; Romans ch. 9-11 ¹⁰ See also 1 Peter 2:9-10 ¹¹ Matthew 5:17 ¹² Deuteronomy 32:21; Romans 10:19; See also the article *Foolish Nation*, on our web site: <http://www.twelvetribe.org/publications/foolish-nation.html> ¹³ Zechariah 12:10; 13:8-9; Romans 11:12-15 ¹⁴ Matthew 19:28 ¹⁵ Malachi 4:6

first century, went astray¹⁶ and ceased to bear the fruit of the Kingdom. Though she began as a pure virgin, characterized by self-sacrificing love and devotion,¹⁷ she became a harlot, characterized by selfishness, strife, jealousy, immorality, and violence, using worldly power and influence to sustain herself.¹⁸ Rather than being a light to the nations, she has brought great darkness to the whole earth, though smugly, she calls it light.¹⁹ That is why, after almost 2000 years, Messiah has not returned, and the Father's promise to Abraham has not been fulfilled.

So now the earth's darkest hours are upon us. Fallen man and fallen religion are steering a steady course toward the utter destruction of the earth and its inhabitants and, unthinkably, of its Creator. Unless there is a rebirth of that spiritual Israel that will bear the fruit of the Kingdom, truly being a light to the nations so that His salvation can reach the ends of the earth, then there is no hope.

Jephthah's Daughter Reborn

In the days of old Israel's decline, the prophet Malachi had foretold:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

The first coming of "Elijah" was through the ministry of John the Baptist,²⁰ who prepared the way for the Messiah's first coming, piercing the hearts of sincere Israelites to see that they had drifted far from the heart of their God. But after John the Baptist had lived and died, Yahshua still said, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things."²¹ What did He mean? What His disciples could not understand then is abundantly clear now: Through Yahshua, the Holy Spirit spoke of a time far in the future when the religious system again

would be utterly fallen and "Elijah" would come again to prepare a people for Messiah's second and final coming.

That prophetic voice is on the earth again today to "restore all things" before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. It is nothing less than the rebirth of the holy nation of twelve tribes — an entire people with the heart of Jephthah's daughter, each one living a life of self-sacrifice by laying down his or her life daily to serve their Father by serving one another. The first thing to be restored was the true gospel, the Good News of the Kingdom, that gave us the faith to utterly and literally abandon our old lives in this world²² because it revealed to us the true Messiah and His kingdom, worth more than our own lives. Our death in baptism was as real as it could be, short of our physical death. When we truly died with Yahshua in baptism,²³ we were truly forgiven, and only then could we present our bodies as an acceptable daily sacrifice.²⁴

A burnt offering is an offering that is given without any reservations. The entire personality is consumed on the altar, as in the example of our Master Yahshua. He did not come just to help us out of trouble, but to take over our life. We are His purchased possession. He bought and paid for us by dying and receiving the wages of our sin in death, so the total surrender of our lives is the only reasonable response.

This true gospel restores the true church: the community that resulted when we all gave up everything²⁵ — possessions, homes, jobs, unwilling relatives, etc. — and clung to one another in love and gratitude for our salvation. This common life together gives us the practical daily context for loving one another just as our Master loved us,²⁶ for being purified and healed of all our selfish ways,²⁷ and for growing to full stature in every aspect of our personalities²⁸ to be made ready as a bride for Him.²⁹

But most importantly, the Spirit we have received is turning the hearts

of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, to fulfill Genesis 18:19 so that our faith and vision does not die after one or two generations. We are raising sons and daughters to have the heart of Jephthah's daughter, not living for themselves, but finding joy in laying down their lives day and night to bring about our Father's will on the earth.

We know that our Master will not return until He has a people on the earth who have put all of His enemies underfoot³⁰ — that is, the spiritual forces that work through our iniquities, fears, and selfish desires, seeking to divide and thus destroy us. And we know He will not return until He has a people who are keeping the righteous requirement of the Law by the Spirit He has given us.³¹ When the light of that spiritual life empowers the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached throughout the whole earth as a witness to all nations, then the end of the age will come,³² and Yahshua the Messiah will return to restore the promised land, enemy-free, to Abraham's natural offspring,³³ fulfilling the promise of His Father.³⁴

All this can only come about when our Father has a people with the heart of Jephthah's daughter who no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died and rose again on their behalf.³⁵ He will be pleased with the "burnt offering" of their lives, and will give them the grace to become that spotless bride for whom His Son will gladly return. If this prophetic vision stirs your heart, and you hate your life in this world, please come and help us bring this evil age to an end. ❧

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 11:3 ¹⁷ Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35 ¹⁸ Revelation 17:1-5; 18:2-5; Isaiah 1:21 (Ironically, the time on earth called "The Dark Ages" is when the fallen church held the greatest influence and power.) ¹⁹ Matthew 6:23; John 9:41 ²⁰ Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14 ²¹ Matthew 17:10-12; Mark 9:11-12 ²² John 12:25-26 ²³ Romans 6:4-5 ²⁴ Romans 12:1-2 ²⁵ Luke 14:26-33; Mark 10:28-30 ²⁶ John 13:34-35 ²⁷ 1 John 3:2-3; James 1:21 ²⁸ Ephesians 2:10; 4:11-16 ²⁹ Ephesians 5:26-27; Revelation 19:7-8 ³⁰ Hebrews 10:13 ³¹ Romans 8:4; Matthew 5:17 ³² Matthew 24:14; Isaiah 49:6 ³³ Acts 3:21; Matthew 19:28; Isaiah 49:8 ³⁴ Genesis 15:18-21 ³⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

What if I painted you a beautiful picture? It might be a white sandy beach beside a crystal blue ocean, or maybe a rustic cabin nestled in a green valley, surrounded by majestic mountains. What could be better than having such a nice picture hanging on your wall? Wouldn't it be the experience of actually walking along the seashore or breathing the clean mountain air? As nice as that picture may be, it wouldn't change the fact that you lived in an apartment in the middle of a crowded city, full of noise and air pollution. The picture itself is only two-dimensional, and can only cause you to *imagine* paradise, not actually be there.

You may have noticed that modern society is becoming increasingly shallow and superficial. Unable to relate to one another on a deep level, people cannot seem to stay together very long at all. Sky-rocketing divorce rates are a clear indicator of this reality. Mankind seems to be afflicted with a fatal flaw, an innate



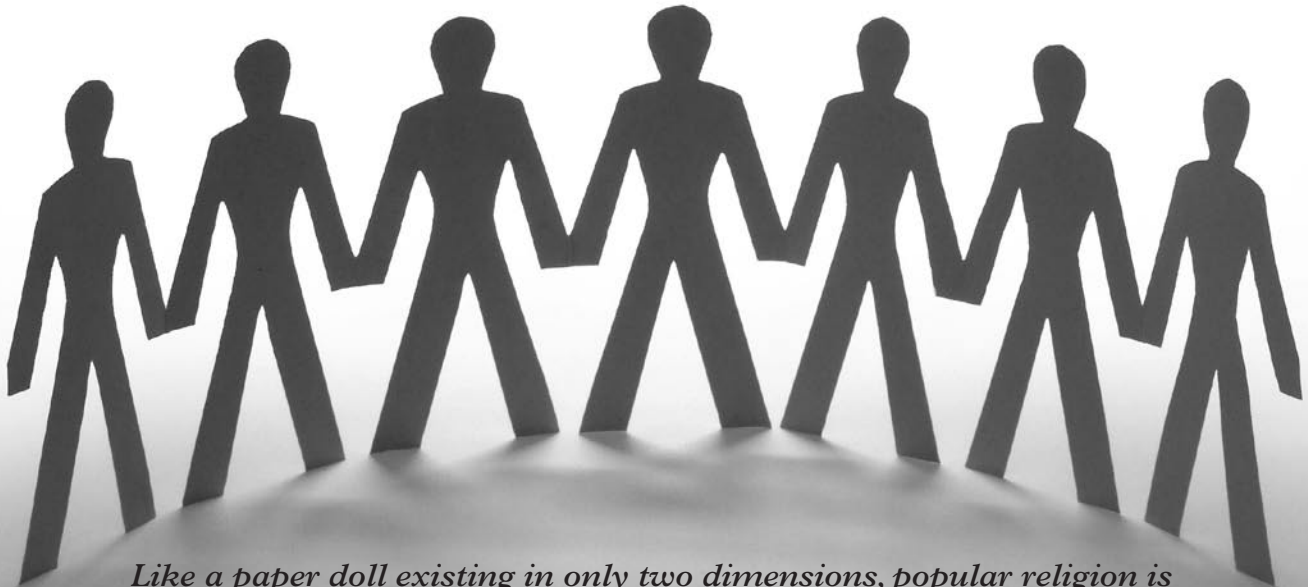
self-centeredness that manifests itself in many forms. Nowhere is this fatal flaw more visible and more tragic than

in humanity's inability to get along with one another. The world today is rife with alienation and division.

Although many may seek God for help, organized religion, especially Christianity, offers no remedy to this inherent malady. Christianity itself is divided into over 37,000 different denominations. This is clear evidence that Christians, like the rest of humanity are unable to overcome the fatal flaw. Attempting to mask this condition with the slogan "unity in diversity" doesn't change the facts. Like the picture hanging on the wall, this unity is merely a two-dimensional fantasy. Can one third of the world's population (two billion people!) really be on "the narrow road" which Yahshua said only a few find? Can 37,000 divisions really be "one in Christ"?

I grew up in one of those 37,000 denominations of the religious system called Christianity. At age twelve, I decided to give my life to Christ. I clearly remember sitting in Rev. Lovell's office while he drew

THE 3RD DIMENSION



Like a paper doll existing in only two dimensions, popular religion is missing the extra dimension that gives it the depth of practical experience — off the two-dimensional pages of the Bible and into real life.

diagrams on the chalkboard to explain salvation to me. I had no idea what he was talking about. Nevertheless, the following Sunday, I found myself descending the stairs that led to the baptismal pool behind the pulpit. Now I was supposed to have eternal life, but in reality, nothing about my life was different. In fact, as I grew older, I saw that there was no substantial difference between the daily lives of most Christians and non-Christians I knew, except that we Christians went to church on Sunday and Wednesday nights.

Two years later, I was “saved” again at a “Fellowship of Christian Athletes” retreat. I remember trying to read my Bible and pray every day. I wanted to know for sure that I really had eternal life, even though, once again, in reality nothing about my life was different. Four years of high school left me wounded and untrusting. I had thrown away my innocence in order to be accepted by my peers. My fatal flaw began to take over. I decided that I would never let anyone hurt me again. I began to harden my heart.

Then I fell in love with a girl from my hometown. We went to the same college. At the time, I was partying all of the time, but the vulnerability of a relationship caused me to feel very insecure with this lifestyle. We began to attend Campus Crusade for Christ meetings, hoping to find God, but the people we met there also didn’t seem any different than anybody else.

During Christmas vacation, my girlfriend’s aunt told us that we needed to be baptized with the Holy Spirit in order to truly be saved. We wanted to be saved so we cried out to Jesus to forgive us and give us His Holy Spirit. She encouraged us to read the Book of Acts. When we read about the early believers, we got very excited. We wanted to be disciples like them, and give all of our energy to spreading the love and forgiveness we had found to others. We decided to sell everything except the basics, drop out of college, and hit the road for Jesus. Why would a disciple be in college anyway?

When we called my girlfriend’s aunt

to tell her the good news, her reply startled us: “You’re going to do what? Jesus wants you to stay in college and be a witness where you are. You need to find a good Bible-believing church.” Then came the words I will never forget: “You are young and have a lot of zeal, but that zeal will pass.” And it certainly would.

We submitted and did as she advised. She had been “with the Lord” much longer than we had. During the next year we went from church to church. We decided to get married, realizing that it was wrong to live together without making a covenant. The churches we attended did not satisfy our yearning to



Can one third of the world’s population really be on “the narrow road” which the Son of God said only a few find?

serve God. We wanted to be radically different. We wanted our lifestyle to back up the words that we preached. We moved in with a Jamaican family and started our own “church.” Surely, if people could see blacks and whites living together, they would see the love of God. “We are all brothers and sisters in Christ,” we proclaimed. “We should live together like a real family, like all who believed in Acts 2 and 4.”

Our brothers and sisters in Christ were strangely unmoved by this message and very adamant to point out, “You don’t have to live that way to be saved.” Meanwhile, our own fatal flaws began to drive us apart from within. It was hard to really trust each other. My wife and I moved out. As predicted, my zeal died and I was left broken and disappointed, still no different from the rest of this fatally flawed world.

After college, my wife and I moved

back to our hometown and bought a house just a few blocks from the church where I was first baptized. I didn’t want to think about God or Jesus. I believed that I had rejected Jesus and was beyond hope. When I wasn’t at work, I was almost always drunk or high, trying to numb the anguish of my heart. I changed philosophies daily. I needed constant stimulus in order to not plunge into despair. My own fatal flaw began to wreak havoc on my marriage. I had expected my wife to make me happy and was unprepared for the cost of being a true husband. To avoid the pain, I became detached and distant. Our marriage went haywire.

One day, my wife met a man on a train who claimed to live in a community where people loved Jesus and each other with all of their heart. His wife wrote her a letter, offering her a home if she ever needed it. I wondered whether it could really be true. The “freepaper” that he gave her spoke about a brotherhood of man. A seed of hope was planted. We promised that one day, we would visit them to see for ourselves.

Three years passed and my downward plunge continued. One day, I found myself face down on my floor, begging God to have mercy on me and deliver me from the hell I was living in. I couldn’t go on. I wanted to die. I promised that if he would really save me that I would give up everything to follow Him. I began to read the Bible, pray, and wait for an answer. A month later, an acquaintance of ours invited us to go on a road trip to visit some people who live together and follow the Messiah, whom they call by His Hebrew name, Yahshua. Then we discovered that this was the same people that my wife had met on the train. We were very excited and decided to go see for ourselves.

We were not prepared for what we found. The life these people had was three-dimensional. There were families and single people, young and old, all living together in the same house and sharing all of their resources. They were modest and clean. The children were happy and well behaved. The

parents were loving and attentive. This was a real family. We visited six more of their communities, and the life that we witnessed was unmistakably the same everywhere we went. They told us that the only reason they could live this way was because Yahshua, the Son of God, had forgiven them of their sin.

The walls of distrust began to crumble, and I dared once again to hope that I could really be saved. When they told me, "You can judge a tree by the fruit it bears," I knew exactly what they were talking about. It was right there in front of me — in three dimensions. It became very clear to me that Christianity did not and could not ever produce the fruit of the Kingdom that the Son of God spoke about in Matthew 21:43. It made so much sense. The reason my life was never any different was because I had never truly given up my own life. I had never really been saved because all I had ever had was two-dimensional mental belief. Like the picture on the wall, it had all been nothing but a fantasy, trying over and over again to be different, but foiled by a fake Jesus.

Eight years later, my wife and I are still together and have two beautiful children whom we love with all of our hearts. We are being healed. I am being saved from that fatal flaw as I am learning to really be honest and face the ways that it has affected my personality. Having spent years detached from reality, it has not been easy to see what really works in my heart, but my brothers and sisters are helping me. They love me enough to be honest with me. My wife helps me, too. She is the most familiar with my fatal flaw. I'm learning to trust her. The life we live requires self-denial. It's a narrow way, but it's real, and I can truthfully say that I *am* different now.

For centuries, mankind has had the Bible. Differing interpretations of what it really means have caused more bloodshed on the earth than just about anything else. Its pages are only two-dimensional. They have no life in and of themselves. This is why the Apostle

John wrote that the Word was made to dwell in flesh.¹ Yahshua lived with His disciples. They could see, hear, and touch Him because He was a real man.²

The kingdom that He proclaimed was not a two-dimensional fantasy. He commanded them to literally lay down their lives for one another.³ He said that the world would know that they were His disciples if they loved one another just as He had loved them,⁴ not just because they were different (although they *were* different), but because they could actually love one another, which is impossible without the Holy Spirit.

For centuries, mankind has had the Bible. Its pages are only two-dimensional — they have no life in and of themselves. This is why the Apostle John wrote that the Word was made to dwell in flesh.

Yahshua said that no one could be His disciple unless he forsook everything that he had — even his own life,⁵ and his own wife if she refused to follow Yahshua where He is, and serve Him there.⁶ According to scripture, the only way anyone can know that he truly believes and has passed out of death and into life is that he obeys Yahshua's commandments by laying down his life for his brothers and sisters.⁷

Without this three-dimensional reality, all anyone has to convince him that he has eternal life is a two-dimensional picture that differs depending on which one of the 37,000 different denominations painted it for him. No matter how hard you stare at a picture and imagine you are there, it cannot change the reality that you are not *there*, where He is. Many people believe that they have eternal life because the "Bible tells me so," but the Bible alone doesn't prove anything and never will. It takes a witness.

A witness is something you can actually see. What is required to reach a verdict is a body of evidence, the

literal Body of Messiah, functioning like a normal healthy body, in unity. In Mark 10:29-30, Yahshua promised His disciples, who had given up everything to follow Him, that they would receive a hundred times as many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, houses, and lands as they had given up. He said it would happen "in this life." This actually began to happen on the Day of Pentecost when the "love of God was poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit that was given to them."⁸

According to Acts 2:44 and 4:32, "all who believed" were of one heart and soul, lived together, and shared everything in common. People literally gave up wives, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, houses, and lives, and began to receive a hundred times what they had given up. This was the three-dimensional unity that Yahshua had prayed for before He went to the cross.⁹ This is what the world needs to see in order to really believe that God loves them, and that He actually sent His Son to save them from their selfish and hurtful ways.

No matter how much Christian preachers preach about the resurrection, apart from the witness of a resurrected people, it means nothing. The Body of Messiah is a three-dimensional reality, a new life that someone who is really saved from his or her sins can enter into. After almost 1900 years of confusion, this new life is once again sprouting on the earth. Why not come and see for yourself? I have not been disappointed. I am a different man.

Patrick



¹ John 1:14 ² 1 John 1:1-3 ³ John 15:12-14 ⁴ John 13:34-35 ⁵ Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 14:26-33 ⁶ John 12:26 ⁷ John 5:24; 13:34-35; 14:21; 15:12-14; 1 John 3:14,16; 5:13 ⁸ Acts 2:1-4; Romans 5:5 ⁹ John 17:20-23

The Bottom Line

- Q:** It seems as if you are saying that if people really believe in the Son of God, then they are going to all love each other and live in total harmony without any divisions. That's a little hard to believe. We live in the real world, after all, and the bottom line for most people is: You've got to look out for yourself, or else you won't survive.
- A:** Yes, exactly. That's a perfect description of the world.¹ But the church is supposed to be a separate society² — a “royal priesthood and holy nation.”³ Holy means *set apart*. So the church is organized on a different basis from the world. We're not looking out for our own interests but for God's interests (which means, for the interests of others).⁴
- Q:** That sounds nice, but what about human nature?
- A:** Let's get one thing straight. Human nature isn't just another word for selfishness. Human nature was created just a little lower than divine nature.⁵ We are His image bearers.⁶ And the nature of God is love.⁷ That's why most people want to love and to be loved. That's why we long for and dream of great things. But there is a flaw in human beings that keeps people from attaining to the things they desire.
- Q:** And you people don't have this flaw?
- A:** Of course, we have it! We come from the most damaged generation in human history. We've got more gaps and cracks and hairline fractures in us than anybody. But we've also got a lifetime supply of “super glue.”
- Q:** Meaning what?
- A:** Meaning that the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom He has given us.⁸ And He, the Spirit of Love, compels us to live, not for ourselves anymore, but for the One who lived, died, and rose again entirely for our sake.⁹
- Q:** Okay, so you're saying that you were born with the fatal flaw, but you're all patched up now, because you've been born again? Is that it?
- A:** Not exactly. Organized religion usually portrays salvation as a one-time experience — something that happens to you when you subscribe to a particular set of beliefs and/or say a prayer asking God to forgive you of your sins. But according to the Bible, there's a lot more to it than that.
- Q:** Like what?
- A:** Well, in the first place, you have to hear the commands of our Master from a qualified messenger — someone who isn't seeking his own glory.¹⁰ And you have to truly believe *in your heart* that God raised Messiah from the dead enough, so that you would put your trust completely in Him, and it wouldn't matter what became of you.¹¹ Then you could actually be “baptized into His death” and begin a life of laying down your life for your brothers.¹² This is what it really means to confess Him as your Lord — not that you would merely say, “Jesus is Lord,” but that you would *actually* obey His commands.¹³ And from that point on, you would live to see His purposes accomplished on the earth, not your own.¹⁴
- Then, in the second place...
- Q:** Hang on a minute. How is that different from organized religion? There are lots of people in lots of churches who are convinced that they've done just exactly what you're talking about.
- A:** Yes, they probably are convinced, but is the world convinced?
- Q:** What do you mean?
- A:** This is the whole point of what we are saying about the fatal flaw in human beings. You can have all sorts of religious opinions. Your beliefs can totally line up with hundreds of Bible verses. But if you don't love each other the way Messiah loved us, then *the world will not be convinced* that you are His disciples.¹⁵ And if you are not one with each other just as the man Yahshua is with His Father in heaven, then *the world will not be convinced* that the Father loved them enough to send His Son to die in their place, in order that they could be reconciled to Him.¹⁶ There has to be a *demonstration* of God's love on the earth in order to convict and convince the unbelieving world.¹⁷ If they don't see such evidence, they have every right to ask us, “Hey, if you have all been reconciled to God — if you are all in fellowship with Him, hearing from Him in your hearts — then how come you can't agree with each other? Doesn't this God that you're united with tell you all the same thing? Or is He schizophrenic?” They've got to see fruit in our lives that proves our repentance.¹⁸ If John the Baptist had the right to demand such fruit from the Pharisees, how much more does the world have the right to demand it of us, who claim to have the Spirit of God dwelling in us?¹⁹

¹ 1 John 5:19 ² 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ³ 1 Peter 2:9 ⁴ Matthew 16:23; Philippians 2:4 ⁵ Psalm 8:5 ⁶ Genesis 1:26-27 ⁷ 1 John 4:8 ⁸ Romans 5:5
⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ¹⁰ Romans 10:14-15; John 7:18; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2 ¹¹ Romans 10:9 ¹² Romans 6:3; 1 John 3:16 ¹³ Luke 6:46 ¹⁴ Romans
 14:7-8 ¹⁵ John 13:34-35 ¹⁶ John 17:22-23; 3:16 ¹⁷ Matthew 24:14; 21:43 ¹⁸ Matthew 7:15-21 ¹⁹ Matthew 3:7-10

Q: So are you saying that you people have the true religion, and therefore you're not bothered by this "fatal flaw" anymore?

A: It's not just a matter of "joining the right church." Yes, it is true that salvation can only happen if a person hears the Master's words from a qualified messenger — someone who accurately represents the demands of the gospel, just as the Son of God spoke them. And the one who hears must put his whole trust in Yahshua. He must believe that God raised Him from the dead, forsake his own life in this world, and choose to live completely for the One who died for us. But that is just the beginning of our salvation. Then as we live a life of obeying His commands,²⁰ He exposes the areas where sin has inroads into our lives. Our souls start being saved.²¹ The flaws in our personalities start being dealt with.

Q: Like what?

A: All sorts of things: fear, presumption, subtle forms of greed, feelings of inferiority, mistrust, pride, and so on — the very things that work in all human beings to divide them from one another, to stir up hatred, to bring about war and oppression and injustice.

Q: So how does that work? Do you have counseling sessions, or quiet times of meditation and introspection, or what?

A: The way our Master designed it is that we would just start obeying His commands. If we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him,²² if we give up our own possessions²³ and embark upon loving one another as He loved us, then a common life together is the result. It was the result in the beginning, as recorded in the early chapters of Acts.²⁴ It has been the result every single time people have heard the true gospel from a true messenger — one who makes disciples and teaches them to obey all the Master's commands. A common life of love will always be the result of preaching the gospel with authority.²⁵

Q: So a person has to live in community to be saved?

A: Putting it in those words might lead to a misunderstanding. But one thing is for sure: You *do* have to believe in Yahshua in order to be saved. And another thing is certain, also: If you *do* believe in Him you *will* obey His commands.²⁶ And if you *do* obey His commands, the chief one being to love one another as He loved us,²⁷ it *will* produce community. And when you live a common life with other disciples, denying yourself and taking up your cross daily, striving to love one another as He loved

us, you quickly find out the inroads that sin has in your life, and your soul starts being saved.

Q: So, then, you see salvation as a process that happens in community?

A: If the community is based on obeying the Master's commands, yes. The continual demand to love exposes selfishness of every kind. The fatal flaw in mankind — self-concern — which is at the root of all human problems, quickly comes to the light. We see it for what it is — the very image of the evil one.²⁸ We face the reality that self-concern is the venom of the serpent, a paralyzing poison that keeps us from being able to love. And if we wish to continue following our Master, if we want to be transformed back into the image of the God who is Love, then we have to deny *self* every day.

Q: So you are saying there is no other way to follow Messiah?

A: Anyone who asks that question needs to face the fatal flaw in himself that is hoping for an easier way. There are only two ways that our Master talked about: the broad way and the narrow way. A false prophet who comes to you with a "sheepskin" might tell you that you can take the broad and easy way, and find life. But anyone who is honest will have to admit that, according to our Master, only the narrow and difficult way of *obeying His commands* leads to life. The broad way — calling Him "Lord" but not doing what He says — leads only to destruction.²⁹

Q: But can't people obey His commands within organized religion?

A: They are welcome to try. But just imagine what would happen if a few people in a large congregation decided to be truly obedient disciples, forsaking their personal possessions and loving each other with the same self-sacrificing love that our Master had. They would, of course, be sharing whatever they had with any of their brothers who had a need, because that's what love does. And in a large congregation there would be plenty of needs.

Within a short space of time, they would find that there were more needs than they could personally meet. And, filled with compassion, they would go to their more prosperous brothers, and point out the needs of the less prosperous members of the congregation, gently reminding them that if they see their brother in need and close their heart against him, the love of God cannot be abiding in them.³⁰ What sort of response do you think they would get from the doctors and lawyers and bank presidents in their congregations? What response would they

²⁰ Romans 1:5; Matthew 28:20 ²¹ James 1:21-22 ²² Luke 9:23 ²³ Luke 12:32-33; 14:33; Acts 2:45 ²⁴ Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-35 ²⁵ Matthew 28:19-20

²⁶ 1 John 3:14-17 ²⁷ John 15:12-14; 1 John 3:23 ²⁸ Mark 8:33-34 ²⁹ Matthew 7:13-27 ³⁰ 1 John 3:17

get from their pastor when they humbly suggested that he would sell his Lincoln Continental so that they could meet the needs of the single mother with four children who just joined the congregation?

Of course, we would like to think that everyone would put the Master's commands into practice, and love with the lavish and unselfish generosity of the One who did not withhold even His own life's blood in meeting the needs of others.³¹ And if they did this, then a community would certainly be the result. But given the religious history of the last 2000 years, it would be highly unlikely. The odds are that they would probably kick the obedient zealots out,³² or at best, that the congregation would split.

Q: Isn't that a pessimistic attitude?

A: If it is, then it is one that is shared by the Son of God Himself. He told us that nobody puts new wine into old wineskins.³³ They only use new wineskins. New wine would burst an old wineskin wide open, and all the new wine would be wasted. Anybody with any sense would never try to put the new wine of the love of God into the dry, inflexible forms of traditional religion. The only possible result would be more schisms. Instead we must go outside the camp of organized religion to a place where the original life of the early Church — a life of love and unity — is being restored.³⁴

Q: You put a lot of emphasis on the disunity in Christianity, but are the people in your group perfectly one?

A: Not yet. We go through struggles. We fail each other and have to forgive each other. But our Master prayed for us to be perfected in unity,³⁵ and we believe that His prayer is being answered.³⁶ So, if we believe He is righteous enough to get what He prayed for, how can we settle for division? Disputes, dissensions, and factions are nothing more than the obvious deeds of the flesh.³⁷ They prove that people have their mind on their own self-interest, and this results in death.³⁸ How could we possibly be satisfied with that?


Q: Don't you think that the Christian Churches, like you, are one in spirit, but they are just working toward a more perfect unity?

A: How could we think such a thing? The Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian Churches have been split for more than 950 years over whether the Holy Spirit was sent from the Father alone, or from both the Father and the Son. Nine centuries are more than enough time to resolve the issue if they really wanted to. And it seems that the answer to the controversy is obvious. The Word of God specifically commands us to resolve our differences *before* we pray or present offerings to God.³⁹ But ever since the eleventh century, the Eastern and Western Churches have been praying and presenting offerings while tolerating division. Nine hundred years of dissension and disobedience to the Word prove that they are simply in the flesh and don't have the Holy Spirit at all⁴⁰ — so it doesn't really matter how He was sent.

Q: So, then, does a person have to join your group?

A: If a person is really serious about doing the will of God, if he wants the Kingdom of God to be expressed here on earth as it is expressed in heaven, and if seeing the unity and love that our Master prayed for become a reality means more to him than his own life, then here is what he should do: He should immediately leave any place where the Master's commands are not being obeyed, and where self-sacrificing love and unity is not being expressed. He should quickly go to the nearest place where such obedience and love and unity are the daily reality. When he gets there, he should tell them he wants to be saved, because if he comes from a place where the Master is not being obeyed, then he has not received the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is only given to those who obey Him.⁴¹ The reason that we are here in this place is that we wanted to do His will, and this is the first and only place we saw it being done.

Q: So the bottom line is...?

A: The bottom line is this: Are you willing to do His will?⁴² 

³¹ 1 John 3:16 ³² 3 John 1:9-10 ³³ Matthew 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:36-38 ³⁴ Hebrews 13:12-13; Matthew 17:11 ³⁵ John 17:22-23 ³⁶ Proverbs 15:29; John 8:29; 1 John 3:22; James 5:16-18 ³⁷ Galatians 5:19-21 ³⁸ Romans 8:6,13 ³⁹ Matthew 5:23-24; 1 Timothy 2:8 ⁴⁰ Galatians 5:20; Acts 5:32 ⁴¹ Acts 5:32 ⁴² John 7:17

“If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” (John 7:17)

The Bottom Line.



Waiting in the Rain

I had the chance to save my best friend from great suffering, but since the cost was high (I had to risk my life), I didn't. I let him suffer, excusing myself from blame, and knowing that my hard-heartedness was deserving of the penalty of death that I knew was coming, someday. Even as I excused myself, I knew that the words were hollow. I could hear the enemy of mankind laughing at my plight, and I began to seek for God.

Insanity

I wasn't able to deal with the knowledge that someone I claimed to love was suffering because of my own selfishness, and my grip on reality slipped. I was swinging between delusions of grandeur and the expectation of destruction for months. I no longer found solace in my music, in drugs, or even in sleep. Alone in my house on a particularly lonely night, I cried out to the God of creation with my whole heart, "Please change me. I know I will be destroyed if I stay like this. I want to love! Help!"

My mother saved my life. One day, she said to me, "You've got to stop moping around. Pick yourself up and get on with your life." Instead of sending me to an institution, which she could easily have done, she chose to give me some tough love. I had to go on. In spite of despair, I got a job and attempted to fit into society.

Hope

By April 1990, I had given up on the Grateful Dead scene — not because there weren't any sincere people there, but simply because there wasn't anything there for a needy person such as myself. I needed true friendship, true understanding, and someone who had the courage to tell me the truth about myself. What I didn't need was shallow, hug 'n' smile, be-good family talk.

During my last day on "the lot," in Hamilton, Ontario, I was wandering along a line of RVs when I heard happy, light music. It wasn't rollicking, bawdy rock & roll. It was somehow clean

The Plan

When I was 18 years old, I wasn't yet aware of anything in my own personality that was not good. I was a self-styled hippie, a product of comic books, video games, and a generous dose of psychedelics. I had just recently discovered the Grateful Dead, and my plan was to lead the world to peace. No, really, I intended to turn the world on to the idea of giving freely of oneself. Love, I was convinced, was the answer. I saw that the hippies of the 60s hadn't really been able to pull off their plan (if they had any) because of the selfishness they fell into. But I wouldn't make the same mistake. I would be different. As you may have guessed, I was in for a surprise.

Robinson's Hole, Nevada, 1989

I went to the Rainbow Gathering full of ideas with which I could lead humanity to a peaceful, friendly future. Never mind that these ideas were very vague and impossible to live out in a daily life. This would prove inconsequential, however, as I went through a traumatic experience that brought me face to face with the reality I had until that time been able

to explain away or avoid. The truth was that I was completely incapable of doing anything for anyone else without thinking somewhere deep inside where people hardly ever look, "What's in it for me?"

I had given up on the Grateful Dead scene — not because there weren't any sincere people there, but simply because there wasn't anything there for a needy person such as myself.



and pure. I followed the sound and stepped around a vendor's tent to see a sight I will never forget. I beheld a huge, beautiful bus, and in front of it a circle of vaguely hippie-looking people, apparently close friends, playing music, smiling, dancing, and singing. I drew a little closer to hear the music better and to see the dancing.

I stayed far enough away so that I wouldn't draw their attention. They looked as if they might try to get others to join in the dance. I inwardly longed for that, but was far too timid at the time to take the chance of doing it wrong and being laughed at. So I watched for a little while, and then they stopped dancing and took off in all directions. One of them came right toward me! My stomach tightened as I considered the possibility of having to talk with one of these strange people. I say "strange" because though the men had beards and ponytails, and the women wore pretty long print skirts, they obviously had a different spirit from what generally was seen on "the lot."

When the tall, smiling man approached me, he simply asked, "Would you like a freepaper?" Relieved, I answered, "Yes." That's about all I could handle at that point.

I drove all the way back to my home in suburban Detroit that night and took a test at my community college the next morning. I crashed into bed,



and when I woke up, I read the paper. It spoke of true friendship, love, and caring for your friends' needs. It spoke of a life of togetherness, a community where this could actually happen. It said that one had to give up everything in order to gain this life. This agreed with what I had read in the Bible. I was enthralled. It sounded just like what the believers in the early church had been doing before whatever caused them to break apart had its effect. I thought about it for months, wishing I could see this in person without ever actually getting up the nerve to call these people and arrange a visit. My fear was at that time greater than my need.

Disappointment

That fall, I went to the University of Montana to study forestry. I also became a

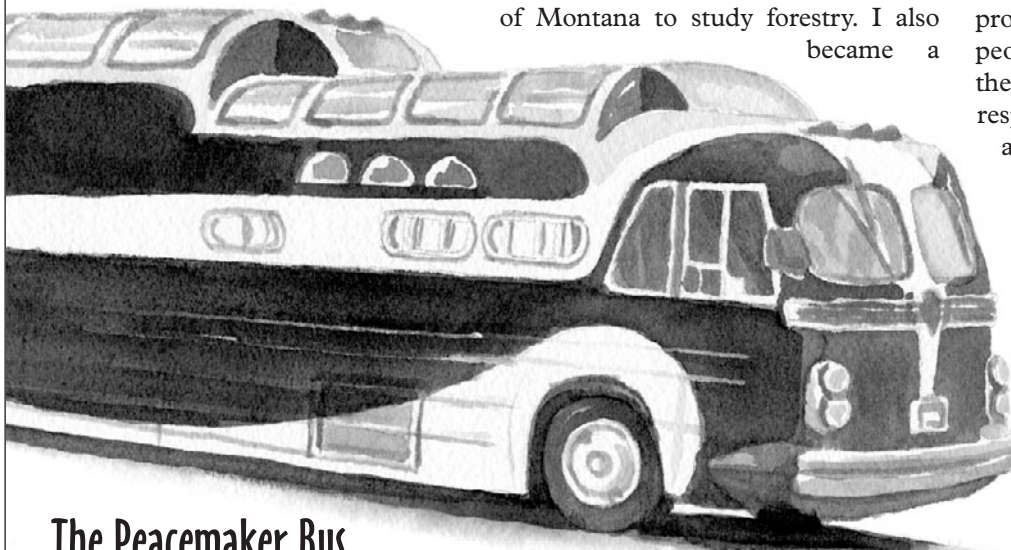
born-again Christian at that time. I watched a pantomime performance portraying Jesus giving His life for me, and the life of friendship that could be had by giving my life to Him. It was the same promise as the freepaper had offered, but at a much lower price. (I didn't actually have to give up anything, but just to be willing to do what I felt led by the "Spirit" to do.)

That began a years-long journey through confusion, frustration, and disappointments. I wanted the life of love that was promised in Acts 2 and 4, and in John 17. My pastors and Christian friends told me that it was not possible for the modern church to live that way; it was only for that time. This did not seem right, nor did the factions within the "church." All the divisions deeply troubled me, because in many places in the New Testament, it was really clear that there was to be no division among believers.

When I brought this to my pastor's attention, he explained it away with a concept known as "The Mystical Body of Christ." Basically, this means that the true believers all believe the same and have the same heart and mind about things, but they are scattered through all the denominations like wheat among weeds. And there's no way to know who's who, except when the Lord returns. That seemed a far cry to me from the life of abundant grace and love that believers are promised.

I believed in a God who keeps promises. When I told them about a people who said that they lived like the first disciples, the first words of response were invariably something along the lines of, "They're probably a cult." I learned later of the adage, "The word *cult* reveals more about the person using it than about the group being described." That described the skepticism with which I received words like that. I was not convinced.

The hardest thing for me to face during this time was that I wasn't able to overcome that thing in me that held back, that selfish core. I asked the pastors about it, and again,



The Peacemaker Bus

it was something that had to wait until the Lord came back. I shouldn't expect to be able to be like Jesus in the here and now. But hadn't Jesus said, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"? I began to lose my zeal for going to church and Bible studies. I still believed that the Bible contained the truth, but I didn't believe that the churches held to that truth. And the worst of all was that they teach that it's not possible to obey the commands of the Scriptures, leading sincere people to believe that the God who inspired those Scriptures is unjust. I wanted no more of it. Ironically, now more than ever, I was afraid I would be disappointed if I visited that community that claimed to be living the life of love written about in the Book of Acts. What a pickle I was in!

Holding Pattern

For a couple of years, I just did whatever jobs seemed good for the short term. I tried Qi Gong for a while. It was interesting and energizing, but it didn't release me from the growing burden of guilt I was under, nor did it give me the power to transcend the selfishness at the core of my being, any more than Christianity had done. Later, I got more daring, and tried my hand at reading Tarot cards. That just gave me a bad conscience, so I burned them. What could I do? Where could I go? I spent some time with my dad in Tennessee, to get away from my familiar surroundings and get my bearings. I needed to make a decision.

Tipping the Scale

At last, I decided to visit the Community. My need had finally grown greater than my fear. I decided that if the Community wasn't the place where true love could be found and learned, then I was going to live as a hermit in that very same desert in Nevada where I had first learned of my sinful, broken condition. Perhaps

in solitude I could find some peace of mind...

I called the Community in Boston, and asked about visiting. When I told them I was in Tennessee, the kind voice on the other end of the phone urged me to call the disciples who were in Asheville, North Carolina, because that was pretty close to me. I called, and to my surprise one of the brothers was planning a trip right past my home, to Chattanooga, the very next day. We ar-



"I felt as if I was waiting in the rain outside a nice, warm house, trying to distract my mind from the love I had seen, afraid that it might be only an illusion . . ."

ranged to meet at a restaurant in Athens, Tennessee, that morning.

I met a man named Deshe, who was destined to become my friend. He told me that I was welcome to come and visit, and that I didn't need to have anything great to bring. I could just come and see the life that God was forming on the earth, and judge for myself whether the love was real. Yes, it cost everything to gain this love, but I could tell by the way this man looked at me and listened to what I had to say that he had more care for me than any of the "shepherds" under whom I had tried to find guidance in the past. I could tell he had given up

all for the King of kings, and that he had found peace in doing so. To do the same was my great desire, so I visited Asheville a few times, and then moved in, at the farm we have in Oak Hill, New York. It was there that I finally received the fullness of the hope that I saw that day in Hamilton, Ontario: the hope that does not disappoint.

It has been seven and a half years since I made the decision to surrender my life to the greater king, and the only thing I have regretted is that I waited (wasted) eight and a half years before coming. For all those years, I felt as if I was standing in the rain waiting outside a nice, warm house. During that time, I always felt that way to one degree or another. Sometimes I was able to distract my mind from the love I had seen in Ontario, but the awareness was always there that what I longed for might be no further away than a phone call (along with the fear that it might only be an illusion).

The right response to Yahshua's sacrifice is now and has always been *total surrender*. He longs (as we, His disciples do) for all His lost ones to come home. He has prepared a place for you among His people, where He lives! If you want to know whether this could really be true, don't wait to find out. Come *now!*



Jim

THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

In the days of John the Baptist and the Son of God, the preserved language of the devout Jews in the land of Palestine was Hebrew. So, when the angel Gabriel brought the good news to the Hebrew virgin, Miriam (or *Mary* in English), that she would give birth to the Savior of the world, and told her what His name would be, what language do you suppose he spoke? Hebrew, of course! And certainly Miriam and Yoceph (or *Joseph* in English) named the child just as the angel had commanded them — *Yahshua*.

In Matthew 1:21, your Bible probably reads, "...and you shall call His name *Jesus*, for He will save His people from their sins." But the name *Jesus* is a modern English adaptation of the Greek name, *Iesous*, which is itself a corruption of the original Hebrew name *Yahshua*. The name *Jesus* or *Iesous* has no meaning of its own, but the Hebrew name *Yahshua* literally means *Yahweh's Salvation*,¹ which makes sense out of what the angel said in Matthew 1:21, "...you shall call His name *Yahshua* [Yahweh's Salvation], for He shall save His people from their sins." If you look in an old King James Bible, you will find the name *Jesus* in the following two passages:

*Which also our fathers that came after brought in with **Jesus** into the possession of the Gentiles, whom*

God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David.

(Acts 7:45, KJV)

*For if **Jesus** had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.*

(Hebrews 4:8, KJV)

However, if you look in any modern Bible, including some more recently printed King James Bibles, you will find that in place of the name *Jesus* they use the name *Joshua*, for in the context it is clear that it is speaking there of Moses' successor and not the Son of God. But in the Greek manuscript the name in both of these verses is *Iesous*.

You see, *Joshua* is the popular English transliteration² of the Hebrew name *Yahshua*. Joshua of the Old Testament had the same name as the One called *Jesus* in the New Testament, for Joshua was the prophetic forerunner of the Son of God, bringing Israel into the Promised Land and leading them to victory over their enemies. But since the translators obviously know this fact, why do they only translate *Iesous* as *Joshua* in these two verses, and as *Jesus* everywhere else?

The NIV New Testament even has a footnote supporting this fact under Matthew 1:21: "*Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua.*"

The fact is, the name of God's Son was not even pronounced as "Jesus" in English until the 16th

century, simply because there was no "J" sound or letter in English until then.³ The modern letter "J" developed from the letter "I" which began to be written with a "tail" when it appeared as the first letter in a capitalized word. So in old English the name now written as *Jesus* was actually written and pronounced much like the original Greek *Iesous*. Eventually the hard "J" sound crept into the English language to accompany the different way of writing the initial "I" in the name.

You may also find it interesting that in Acts 26:14-15, it says that the apostle Paul heard the name of the Son of God pronounced "in the Hebrew tongue" by the Son of God Himself, so he certainly didn't hear the Greek name *Iesous* or the English name *Jesus*, but rather the Hebrew name, the name above all names, *Yahshua*.⁴

Wouldn't it be better to call the Son of God, the Savior, by His true name — the name His own mother, Miriam, and father, Yoceph, and all of His Jewish friends called Him? Not only have we found out what His true Hebrew name is, but we have found His true Body on earth as well.

Please take the time to read the other articles in this paper. You are always welcome to come visit us in any of our communities. Please see the back cover for more about the life we share. ☺

¹ **Yah** is the personal name of God, and **shua** is from a Hebrew root word that means "to save." God identified Himself to Moses as **YAH** (meaning "I AM") in Exodus 3:14, as in Psalm 68:4, KJV ("...by His name *Yah*"), and as most familiar in the word **Hallelujah** ("Praise Yah"). And in John 5:43 and 17:11, *Yahshua* says that He came in His Father's name, "the name which You have given Me" (NASB), so it is not surprising that the Father's name would be incorporated into the Son's name, **Yahshua**.² *transliteration* — expressing words of a language by using the characters of another alphabet. ³ *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1496, 1507.

⁴ Philippians 2:9; Acts 4:12

EDAH is the Hebrew word for **community** (Jeremiah 30:20, NIV), which also means **witness** and **beehive**. This word portrays the way a group of people or hive of bees live and work together with a common identity. Bees live a selfless life of devotion to the bee kingdom. They have no concern for themselves but only for the hive and the constant production of honey. So it is with those who are in the communities of God.

Like a Beehive

Have you ever watched a beehive? It is fascinating seeing thousands of little bees working together to produce honey. As you come near the hive, you can hear an exciting buzz as they go about the many tasks necessary to keep the hive alive. The workers are responsible to collect nectar and guard the hive. The young bees keep the hive in good condition, feed the larvae, and support in other household chores. There is never a dull moment in the busy life of a little bee.

This is much like the life that we have. No matter what we do, we love to do it together. Daily we gather to thank our Master for His salvation, and to hear Him speak to us through one another. This gathering keeps alive a genuine love and care for each other. As we work, we take advantage of the daily situations, guarding ourselves from the selfishness and pride that would come in to separate us and take away our love. Our children are a vital part of our life. We not only educate them, but we work with them to accomplish the simple tasks necessary to maintain a family life. Our life is not a dull routine of chores, but is full of the warmth that comes from the sweet fellowship of friends speaking their hearts to one another, celebrating the Sabbath every week, and participating in weddings and festivals.

But there are a few things that differ in our life from that of a beehive. One is that we are not driven by instinct or controlled by something separate from our own will. Each of us is here because we chose to leave behind our own separate lives to increase the life of this hive. Our life is not enclosed like the hive of a bee, nor do we have a stinger to harm any uninvited guests. We welcome anyone to experience our life with us. Please come and see what it is like to be part of a beehive of people expressing the warmth and love of our Creator. 🌸

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AUSTRALIA

- Community in Sydney (Oatlands)**, 204 Pennant Hills Road, Oatlands, NSW 2117, Australia ☎ (61) 02 9630 9619