

Miki Hardy

THE CHURCH NEEDS TO KNOW

It is time to address some key issues directly
in order for Christians to realise
that the Lord has better things in store for them!



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The Church Needs to Know by Miki Hardy

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Chapter I

God's Heart on Marriage and Divorce

Many Christians today can recall a time when the divorce of a pastor or person in leadership in the Church bordered on the scandalous. For such a person to continue in ministry was inconceivable. Increasingly today, we see pastors getting divorced, remarrying and carrying on as though nothing major had occurred. I believe that this stems from the compromise and religiosity that has replaced sound doctrine and Biblical Truth in the Church. This is what lies at the root of this state of affairs. Now, if a pastor can divorce his wife and continue to lead God's people, then what example does the flock have to follow?

Perhaps the questions we should ask ourselves are, 'Why can't two spirit-filled Christians work out their differences?' And, 'Is there any justification for these to remain unresolved, or for them to divorce?' Whether it applies to a pastor, or a member of the congregation, I think separation, divorce, and remarriage takes place because as a couple, they do not know their true responsibility towards each other in marriage. We see in Scripture that the husband has a very big responsibility: that of loving his wife as Christ loves the Church. Likewise, the wife is called to submit to him. Unless both take up their cross, and allow the Spirit of God to break and change them, that can never happen... Only God can do this in their hearts. No technique can do that... it is the fruit of the Cross at work in both of their lives!

I have not found anything in Scripture that would lead me to believe that it is God's will for any Christian couple, let alone a pastor, to get divorced. This is simply because through the Cross, God has

provided a way for the restoration of love and unity between them. So let us consider what the Word of God reveals on the subject of marriage and divorce...

Today, many in the Church find it quite acceptable or normal that Christians get divorced, because one spouse no longer gets on with the other; or even that they no longer see eye to eye or share the same vision!

This is definitely an area where the Church has allowed itself to be influenced, not only by the ways of an unbelieving world, but also by Christian leaders who have written books, justifying their own, very subjective, experiences. By taking the option of divorce, they have opened the door for believers to do the same. I am convinced that we should be looking, instead, at God's perspective on this subject.

Marriage under the New Covenant

In Genesis, God instituted marriage. After what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross, marriage under the Old Covenant, with its multiple wives and letters of divorce, cannot be compared with marriage under the New Covenant.

God's plan for us, as born-again Christians, is to live with our husbands and wives until 'death do us part'. In Mark 10:2, after

Jesus had been challenging the legalism of the Pharisees on so many issues, they tried to test Him by asking: *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”* Jesus showed them that, under Moses and the Law, God had ‘allowed’ divorce because of the hardness of their hearts, (Mark 10:5); but under the New Covenant, things would be different. In Matthew 5:32, He states plainly what is expected of all New Covenant believers: *“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”* ‘Except sexual immorality’ obviously does not mean when one partner happens to fall into sin and commits an act of adultery or infidelity. It speaks of a person being backslidden and living in sin, and determined to continue in immorality. In allowing divorce in that very specific case, Jesus does not take away the fact that the other partner still needs to humble him or herself and forgive. This can truly happen only when we accept the way of the Cross. The Bible, therefore, is clear: under the New Covenant, there is no justification for divorce except in very specific cases... otherwise it devalues what Jesus Christ accomplished at Calvary!

Powerless gospels

I am certain you have noticed that the Church has lost its conviction in this area, behaving as though the Gospel were something that changes with the times. The Church, including pastors and leaders, rightly did not accept divorce a few decades ago, but it has become common in churches today. What has happened? Surely it is because the message being preached today has changed and has no power to deal with such issues. Obviously, it no longer brings the same conviction as before. A good example is the 'Prosperity' gospel that causes hearts to be drawn to material things instead of seeking spiritual maturity. It does not edify, and certainly is powerless to confront the deep inner issues that believers face today. This is why a return to the preaching of the message of the Cross is vital if we want to see Christian families united and a drop in the rate of divorce in the Church.

Christians today often want a simple solution to marital problems, an easy way out. They divorce for trivial reasons such as: 'She won't submit to my authority; he isn't spiritual enough,' or worse, 'We no longer fit together, our vision and ambitions have changed...' They obviously cannot be hearing the right gospel, as the true Gospel would lead them to assume their responsibilities towards each other.

The role of the husband

Allow me to expand on the amazing revelation Paul had about marriage in Ephesians 5. The relationship between a husband and a wife is the only one in the New Testament that is paralleled with the relationship Jesus has with His Church. Paul declares boldly that, *“as Christ loved the Church and gave His life for her, so a husband should love his wife.”* Jesus humbled Himself, took the form of man, was obedient unto death even the death of the Cross. That is the attitude Jesus is asking a husband to have towards his wife. That is the role of the husband: like Jesus, he is called to lose his rights and his life for his wife. This is the key to a successful marriage.

God’s order for marriage

The role of the wife, however, is compared to that of the Church. Paul states that just *“as the Church submits to Christ, so the wife should submit to her husband.”* So, when the Church – you and I – understands what Jesus did for it on the Cross, in other words, the love He demonstrated, we can love Him in return. It was impossible for us to love Him before we experienced His love for us. Can you see the order of things here?

It is clear, therefore, that the husband has a greater responsibility than his wife in the marriage, since his ministry is compared to Christ's, whereas the wife's is compared to that of the Church. If the husband is willing to take the first step, in obedience to his calling, as Jesus did, he will reap an attitude of submission from his wife. Obviously, the submission of a wife is not automatic; but when the proper foundation is laid, the husband can expect his wife to submit to him. However, even if the wife does not do so, he should still continue to give his life for her, and trust God for a miracle in her heart.

At the end of the passage, Paul quotes the Old Testament verse, *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh."* God's heart for marriage is for a husband and wife to remain united for life. When we obey God's commandments, He is faithful to perform miracles.

The husband of but one wife

There are many specific scenarios in marriage not mentioned in the Bible. In our own church, we have experienced different situations over the years, and have learnt to deal with them individually, with grace and truth. In every case where the brother or sister has taken the road of the Cross, and allowed repentance to do its work in his or

her heart, we have seen restoration and victories in their lives and in their service for the Lord.

Let me just add that God is not a God of the second or third chance. His plan has always been for a husband to have one wife and He has provided the means for that by sending Jesus in the form of man, to die on the Cross and conquer sin in the flesh. It is up to us to give up our lives as a sacrifice so that our flesh can be crucified. A man who divorces his wife and continues in the ministry as if nothing has happened, can never expect to carry the same anointing in his service for God. This is especially true if he has remarried, until he stops justifying his decision and repents.

The key to restoration

It is not God's plan for anyone to get divorced. God disapproves of divorce; but He does not reject those who have divorced – or those who have remarried – if they repent. If I have touched on any of your experiences, it's not too late. God can restore you, along with your ministry if you are in leadership, provided that you are prepared to acknowledge that you did not act in line with God's heart and Word, but according to the desires of your flesh; and that, possibly, you entered into a wrong relationship.

If this is the case, you must come before God in true repentance, according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, with a readiness to do whatever He asks of you... even if that may mean returning to your original spouse. Remember that the Lord isn't interested in reasons or explanations about what your partner is like, or what he or she may have done. He looks at the heart of Man.

In all cases, God still desires a pure, humble, forgiving, and repentant heart. There may well be relationships that are beyond repair; but, so many more are repairable, if we are prepared to deny ourselves and take up our cross. The Cross is God's provision for a successful marriage!

Chapter II

Can Christians be Demon-possessed?

As I have travelled across Africa over the past 25 years, one question has come up repeatedly: 'Can a born-again believer be demon possessed?' This is often associated with past activities of the individual concerned, or even worse, something that his ancestors might have been involved in.

It saddens me that there are so many Christians who believe that they themselves, or their brothers and sisters in Christ, can be possessed by demons after having received their salvation. We all acknowledge that demonic activity and evil spirits are real. But is it possible for a born-again believer to need deliverance from demons? When I read the Scriptures, my answer to this question is a categorical 'No!' The Bible is very clear on this matter: when we are born-again, we are delivered from the powers of darkness and are translated into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us and light cannot dwell with darkness.

There is simply no way that a demon can live in a truly born-again Christian who has given his life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and desires to serve Him. It is simply impossible! We may want to consider the conversion experience of people who have come forward at meetings and repeated the Sinner's Prayer, yet continue to manifest signs of what might be demonic activity? In this case, maybe we need to ask the question: 'Has true repentance occurred in their hearts?'

But even more importantly, I believe that many of the problems ascribed to demon possession are in fact just manifestations of the flesh. Sadly, Christians are led to believe that these fleshly manifestations are attributed to the devil. What the Church needs to know is that, in such cases as these, deliverance is not the answer. When our lives line up with the model of Jesus Christ, and we are taking up our cross daily, putting our flesh to death and following Him, then 'demon-possession' will not even be an issue for our lives, or for the Church.

The spiritual world exists and is more powerful than what we may think. That's why when God touches our life, we can be transformed in an instant. In the same manner, there are people whose lives are influenced by demons and evil spirits. In the Gospels, Jesus Himself cast demons out of people and sets them free. Demon-possession is real and cannot be denied. However in Matthew 12, where Jesus speaks about deliverance, he was speaking before the Cross and was referring to a wicked generation, not to the Church. So, my point is this: do born-again Christians, who have repented of past sins, and truly surrendered their lives to Jesus, still need deliverance from demons?

Born-again or not?

I cannot find a single case of born-again believers being set free from demons in the Early Church of the Bible. Either you are born-again, or you aren't; there is nothing in between! Before we came to know Jesus, we were under satan's control. We did not know God, and in fact we were all under the influence of evil spirits, or even possessed by them (Ephesians 2:1-5). When an unbeliever truly repents of his sins, and believes in Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, God Almighty Himself comes to live in his heart. Colossians 1:13 explains it thus: *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."* Having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the nature of sin that controlled us previously has been replaced by the nature of God.

Often, it is not even necessary to pray for deliverance. The unbeliever is already under so much conviction and so willing to surrender his life to Christ, that he is set free by the power of the Holy Spirit in a split second. In other cases, prayer for his deliverance is necessary. You may rightly ask, therefore, what are all these demonic manifestations in churches today about?

The answer is that many people only come to church for healing and deliverance, to be blessed, and not first and foremost to seek God. Therefore, not being born-again, demonic influences continue to rule

their lives. However, it is impossible for truly born-again Christians still to be under the power of demons, unless they backslide to the point that they have completely broken fellowship with Christ, have denied the Lord and opened their hearts and lives to demonic activity. For, how can the Holy Spirit possibly dwell in the same body as a demon?

Many of the problems and issues attributed to demons have their roots elsewhere. If we are not on the foundation of the Cross, we quickly find ourselves swallowing all sorts of false teachings and strange doctrines. We blame demons for anything and everything that goes wrong...

It's the flesh!

Let us be clear, I may find myself, as a Christian, tempted or struggling with issues in my life, but this does not mean that I have an evil spirit in me... rather that I have simply yielded to the passions of my flesh.

Of course we can be tempted, but we must differentiate between being tempted and being possessed by an evil spirit. It is only when I deny myself, am prepared to give up my rights, and lose my life by taking up my cross, that I can have victory in a specific circumstance. I have no need, whatsoever, for any demon to be cast out; I am already demon-free!

Deliverance is not the answer

God has opened a way for us not to bow to our flesh, or to surrender to its desires. It is the way of the Cross. That is why our lives have no connection with demons. The Spirit of the Lord lives in us. He intercedes for us and helps us to crucify that flesh, by God's grace. What God wants to do in your life through the walk of sanctification cannot be substituted with a prayer of deliverance.

Do not let anyone try to cast out of you a demon of anger, laziness, jealousy, etc. Likewise, you cannot solve the problems you have with your spouse, your children, or another Christian by trying to cast out a demon... These are manifestations of your flesh; the fruit of a life not surrendered to the Lord. Many believers today are discouraged because they know what they should be; but, faced with the reality of what they are, feel only failure and defeat. So they resort to deliverance. Victory is in the Cross. Be ready to lose your life and you will see the results... We can be weak in many areas, but still manifest the life of Christ. We are demon-free, and walking on the road to perfection; glory to God! For a description of the works of the flesh, just look at the list in Galatians 5:19-21. And, let me tell you, you do not need to be delivered from demons to have victory over any of these things. Simply take up your cross!

Identification with Christ

It is important for us to understand the purpose of the message of the Cross for our lives. We must be willing to be identified with the death of Christ in order to carry His life and be free. As soon as the Cross is set aside, we look for a short cut, or a substitute like deliverance, a kind of 'press-a-button' Christianity. Yet, in Galatians 2:20, Paul's statement, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God..."* is such a wonderful declaration of his way of life.

Through the revelation he received, Paul learnt that he needed to identify his life with Christ's, to deny himself, to crucify his flesh. He lived that revelation and was able to preach it; his life was a testimony of the transformation that the Cross brings. The message of the Cross is a constant warning and a reminder that exposes the weaknesses of our flesh, and allows us to see our real state. It brings us to repentance, to deny ourselves, to return to the Cross once again.

Free indeed!

So, dear brother or sister, if you are sure that deep down in your heart, your life is surrendered to Christ, then do not confuse the

weaknesses of your flesh with being demon-possessed. You may be a weak Christian but you are nonetheless demon-free. Hallelujah! That is why Apostle Paul spoke so much about the dangers of the flesh. He was fully aware of its weakness. Remember: *“If the Son of man has set you free, you are free indeed!”*

Chapter III

The Christian and his Money

If there is one area where Christians today are being manipulated and taught deceptive doctrines, it is definitely the area of finances and giving. To the great shame of the Church, many pastors are leading the flock astray with false promises of prosperity and blessings; misleading them by using laws that oblige them to give.

I have often spoken out against the doctrine of prosperity that has invaded the Church, both in rich and poor countries. My messages have been described as contentious because I have condemned the preaching of this false doctrine.

I have absolutely no problem with Christians prospering materially, and being blessed. But I do take strong issue with the teaching that it is God's will that all believers are called to be rich. Where is this to be found in Scripture? Even in the Early Church, there were poor Christians. Therefore, I believe it is heresy to make all Christians believe that it is God's will for all of them to be rich, possess big houses, luxury cars, etc., or that they somehow lack faith if they remain poor... a complete heresy! In places like Africa and India, most believers live in conditions of extreme poverty. There is no shame in that, and it does not mean they lack faith. Moreover, far too much importance is given to money in messages preached these days!

It's not that I am attacking the teaching of prosperity, but rather, I believe that we need to look at God's Word on this subject from the right perspective – to seek the heart of the Lord about it. What

saddens me most is the fact that so many poor believers in churches where this doctrine prevails, never come to realise that God is only interested in the heart that is behind what we give to Him. God loves a cheerful giver, not a rich one!

In far too many churches, when it comes to giving, people are either bringing their offerings with the expectation of receiving some abundance in return, or because they feel pressure and dread at going against 'what the Bible says'! Yet, looking at the Word of God, when do we ever see Jesus or the Apostles talking about 'prosperity' in this sense? What is evident is that God has promised to take care of us (Matthew 6:25-26); it is a demonstration of God's heart for His people and His vision for the Kingdom.

The Bible is not a manual of techniques and principles for preachers to use to ask you to give them money so that God can bless you in return!

Loving Jesus, loving His Kingdom

God's plan for His Church is for Christians to carry His heart as a testimony to an unbelieving world. For the grateful believer who knows that Jesus gave everything for him, whose heart has been captivated, and whose life Christ has transformed, wanting to give is natural. He

is not someone who is bringing his offering because he has to, or because someone told him how much or how to give. He is certainly not giving just in order to be blessed in return. He is giving because he loves Jesus and the Kingdom; he is grateful for his salvation.

His life is fully identified with Christ's, and his heart is totally committed to God's vision for His Church. Here is someone able to give sacrificially, well beyond any set percentage, or fixed amount. He sows cheerfully into the Kingdom as the Holy Spirit leads him. Such a Christian can give liberally, even in times of extreme poverty, in the same way we see the Macedonian church doing in 2 Corinthians 8. He walks in the faith that God will take care of his personal needs, because he knows his heart is for the Kingdom.

God wants us to prosper

There are two portions of Scripture that almost every Christian knows and has probably heard teaching on in relation to giving and prosperity. In both cases, false doctrines have infiltrated the Church as a result of preachers taking these verses out of context...

In 3 John 1-8, we read: *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."* Now, we know that Apostle John is commending Gaius for the heart, the love, the

concern that he has for the Kingdom, and for his hospitality towards the people of God. Isn't it natural that John would want God to bless a man with a heart such as this?

The Apostle wants Gaius to prosper in all areas, because he knows that whatever he receives from God will be used to bless his fellow believers and will be of benefit to the Kingdom. So, how did we jump from this specific context to declaring that it is God's will – His purpose and His plan – that all Christians must prosper financially; that all believers should expect to receive a hundredfold in return, if they will only give to this preacher, or to that project?

This is simply not Scriptural! However, what we can say without any shadow of a doubt, is that God does want to bless every Christian, who, like Gaius, has a heart for the Kingdom, and is hospitable towards God's people.

New Covenant vision

When we read the words of Jesus Christ in Luke 6, we see the same spirit, the same heart, as that of John and all the other Apostles. The context here (verses 27-46) is of Jesus speaking to the crowds about having a different heart, a different vision... that of the Kingdom. He

is asking the people to give their lives and allow God to change them so that they might live according to the New Covenant.

In this context, just because He states in verse 38: *“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you”* is no reason for anyone to conclude that He is talking about giving and prosperity. This passage is all about the attitude of heart that should be carried by the believer whose chief concern is the Kingdom. In verse 46, Jesus even ends with: *“But why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”* No one, therefore, should use this Scripture to convince people that as long as you give, no matter what state of heart or what attitude you have, God is still bound to bless you in return. That’s why there are millions of Christians today eternally waiting for their blessings!

According to your heart

Allow me to point out that if you still believe you are obliged to give to God then you have not fully understood the depth of what Jesus Christ did on the Cross; what freedom was purchased for us by the Son of God. He has set us free! Today, we are free to give from our hearts, as the Holy Spirit leads us.

Do you realise that if I had to rely on someone or on some Old Testament law under the Levitical priesthood to tell me how much I should give, I could end up giving less than what I actually have on my heart? Now, in the proper context, we can see the heart of the New Covenant believer in Apostle Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 9:7: *"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."*

This verse does not paint the picture of a fearful, reluctant believer who is obliged to give because it is expected of him, or because everyone will know exactly how much his offering is.

Free to serve

The churches of Macedonia were able to give out of their extreme poverty, as a result of a gospel that had brought them to lose their lives, to deny themselves, to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus. Their generosity stemmed from the fruit of the work of the Gospel, not from some emotional manipulation. They earnestly desired and insisted on having a part in a project that was spiritual and of benefit to the Kingdom and other believers.

Please understand that I am not trying to make you look back and question how and to what you may have given your money in the

past. But I know that there are many believers who are seeking for truth. And all I want is for the Church to know what God's heart is on the issue of money; what sound doctrine according to His Word is, so that, by His grace and with the Holy Spirit guiding us, we can be free to serve Him with our finances.

Chapter IV

God and Music

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the dividing line between secular music and what is described as 'Contemporary Christian Music', is extremely thin. It is sad to say, but much of what we hear today is simply pop music with Christian lyrics.

As the spirit of this world creeps insidiously into the Church, it is not surprising that its music does so as well. When we consider the 'Christian' music and worship that is out there today, we can already see clear evidence of just how much the spirit of the world has invaded the Church. As worship begins to take on a distinctly worldly flavour, we see how it brings confusion and a struggle to Christians, especially young people.

The question that I ask is simply this: 'What has true worship got to do with music from the world?' I find it hard to understand why we would, and are trying to, mix the two – praising the Lord with a worldly beat... surely, it can't be done! When we are born-again, we should want to worship from our hearts, in Spirit and in Truth. Anything else is just entertainment for the flesh.

Once again, I believe that looking at the Word of God will lead us into new insights and revelation as to God's heart on the subject of praise and worship. Let us be careful not to accept everything that carries the label 'Christian' as necessarily actually giving glory to God.

We find no clear instructions in the Bible as to how we should worship God. There are Old Testament precepts relating to music, worship,

and instruments, as well as examples of God's people praising Him with rejoicing and dancing; but no indication as to what type of melody, lyric, rhythm or beat we should use in the New Testament Church. There is a good reason for this... Remember that we are a New Covenant people! Whether we are black or white, rich or poor, educated or not, we all have two things in common: our hearts, and the Holy Spirit. He is our Teacher; He guides us and testifies to our hearts as to what is from God our Father, and what is not.

The Holy Spirit is our guide

In John 16:13-14, we read: *“However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all Truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”* There is no confusion here: the Holy Spirit is the one who will guide us, teach us, and lead us as to how Jesus would respond and the way Jesus would act. We would all agree that there was a fragrance to everything that Jesus said and did. Likewise, the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ should accompany everything we say and do. What comes from the world is of a different spirit; but because God has given us (born-again Christians) the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts, we are able to discern the spirit of this world that is under satan's control.

Strange things happening

I believe people are aware that even in the Christian world there are some very emotional and carnal things going on. Unfortunately, just because something bears the label 'Christian' does not guarantee that it will be good for your heart or your spirit. As much as there is worship and music today that witness to our hearts as being from the Lord, there is also much music, singing, and dancing that give off a strong flavour of the world and carnality. Let us be careful not to take the Word of God to the letter. When it says *"Praise Him with instruments"* or *"Praise Him with dances and rejoicing,"* it does not mean we can bring the spirit of this world into the Church, by dancing in any way we feel like, or using instruments to play with a beat or style that is indistinguishable from what is heard in nightclubs.

By looking at a few Biblical examples of dancing and rejoicing, I believe we can see the difference between music and worship that honours God by reflecting what is in our hearts, and music that entertains and feeds our flesh, and can only lead us into sin further down the road.

In 2 Samuel 6:12-15, relating to the time David brought the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of God, back to Jerusalem, verses 14-15 state: *"Then David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So, David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting*

and with the sound of the trumpet.” David and the people of Israel were celebrating a great victory. His godly, humble, and pure joy overflowed to the point that he just had to dance, even if it appeared foolish to his wife. The people were rejoicing at what God had done, they knew this was not man’s doing. When David slaughtered Goliath, the very people who had been trembling in fear were suddenly filled with courage and went out to attack the Philistines.

After returning from battles like these, we read in 1 Samuel 18:6-7 that: *“the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. So the women sang as they danced...”* In the New Testament (Acts 3), Peter and John came to the temple one day, and a man who was lame from birth was healed. This man leapt with joy and danced in the temple praising God for his miracle. He could not keep his joy to himself.

Spontaneous rejoicing

In all three examples, we see a spontaneous outburst of gratitude and rejoicing, springing from thanksgiving that results in singing, dancing, and music. It is all about God and not about the music. When we are humbled by what God has done, we are free to rejoice as our hearts lead us. There is no problem with singing or dancing in these circumstances.

But when the worship team decides on a Sunday morning that 'now' is the time to start praising the Lord with dances, or worship by appealing to people's emotions, with music that is nothing more than Christian lyrics set to a worldly beat and which only draws us to the performance, we must begin to ask questions. It is the same for today's so-called 'Gospel Concerts'.

What happens afterwards to these young men and women whose emotions and whose flesh have been whipped up to a feverous pitch by the musicians on stage? How is Jesus honoured and glorified in all this? Some might say it is how young people worship today and a way for them to bring their friends to hear about the Lord. But I would ask how many of these friends really get born-again in these concerts? And, more importantly, how many of these Christians are on the road to backsliding as a result of indulging their flesh in this way. I know personally that when I hear or watch this type of event, the Holy Spirit in me testifies that something is not right. And we all know who and what is behind everything that is not of the Spirit!

We cannot hide behind Gospel music that entertains us in our emotions and stirs up our flesh. The flesh cannot produce spiritual life, therefore, the moment it responds to a type of music we are in danger. As a spiritual people, we must be able to discern between Godly music, worship from the heart that edifies, and worldly music that simply indulges our flesh and emotions.

Music has two sources

As we know, music originates only from one of two sources. The first is from the heart of God – where men and women, often as a result of a direct experience of His hand at work in their lives, are led by the Holy Spirit to compose a melody or write a song. Many of the great hymns testify to this. God creates this music in the heart of man to worship and praise Him, to give Him all the glory, the honour, and the power. When the anointing of God is present, our hearts melt and we are drawn into His presence. The second source is the spirit that reigns in the world – where the beat, rhythm, and moves are carnal and worldly.

Music is another great danger area for the Church when we lay aside the foundation, i.e. the message of the Cross, which continually challenges us and brings us to maturity. However, if we stay on this foundation, as we grow and become more like Christ, we will automatically know what to do, where to go and what to listen to. And we will find that we are no longer attracted to music that does not benefit us in any way.

I trust that these few words have brought some light and clarity on this subject; that God has opened your eyes somehow and you have been encouraged.

Chapter V

Spiritual Warfare

Another doctrine that has crept into the Church today is that of 'spiritual warfare'. Christians everywhere are putting emphasis on casting out demons and binding evil spirits wherever they go. If we want to live according to the sound doctrine of Christ, we need to search the Scriptures to see what is in God's heart, and in the heart of the Apostles who wrote the Epistles.

Today, in many churches, there is much talk and activity when it comes to spiritual warfare, and the passage of Scripture usually referred to when this topic is addressed is Ephesians 6. When I look at this passage, however, I see nothing about waging war with evil spirits. What I do see is the real call of God on the believer's life. Apostle Paul urges us to strengthen ourselves in the Lord, in order to be able to stand in the evil day. Elsewhere, when the enemy attacks, Apostle James instructs us to: "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*"

In fact, much of what the Church calls 'spiritual warfare' today is nothing other than fighting demons. Christians see it as the way to have victory in their lives. Yet, the Bible states clearly that: "*...if we are in Christ, the devil cannot touch us.*" If our lives are right before God, and our hearts are pure, why should we fear demons? We need only resist them. We are called to live a victorious life, and we will experience that victory and resist the attacks of the devil when we follow Jesus' instruction in Matthew 16:24 to "*...deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.*"

When we consider Scripture in its proper context, and we have a clear understanding of what took place at the Cross, we will begin to see our own position and standing in Christ and in His Word. I believe that those who practice 'spiritual warfare' should ask themselves three questions... 'What exactly is spiritual warfare?' 'Where in the New Testament is this mentioned?' and, 'Was Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross not enough?'

In Ephesians 6, I believe that Apostle Paul is describing a walk of victory with the Lord; a victorious lifestyle of righteous and pure living that is pleasing to God. Somehow, these verses have been taken out of context and wrongly interpreted to mean that spiritual warfare is a part of the calling of a Christian. Today, the result is that an understanding has crept into the Church that, if we want victory, we need to be constantly fighting demons, evil spirits, and every power and principality; to be binding and loosing spirits at every opportunity because they are all around us everywhere.

Let us look at verses 10-11: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, etc..."* The purpose of this scripture is not to teach us how to enter into spiritual warfare. The call here is to strengthen ourselves, because the enemy will attack! Paul is saying: 'Be established in Christ because the evil day is here.' The Apostle is fully aware that

any battle or struggle in our lives is indeed a spiritual one, and not something physical or natural. He is warning us in advance that we need to be strong in the Lord. In other words, if we are spiritually mature we will not succumb to the schemes of the enemy.

The key is the desire to grow, and a willingness to surrender our lives fully to Christ. The Lord will then give us the grace to stand, even if we are young Christians, as we resist the devil. God will not allow the enemy to cross the line because He is our protection; He is our shield and our deliverer. Paul's heartfelt desire is that we serve the Lord in all circumstances and that when the enemy attacks, we are spiritually strong enough in the faith that we can stand firm and experience victory.

Submitting to God

Apostle James says in his Epistle (4:7-8): *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners..."* The spirit behind these verses is identical to that in Ephesians 6; same calling, same lifestyle, same authority! By asking us to submit our lives to God, he means denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and then, resisting the devil.

How can we believe that we can remain carnal, and yet go on the warpath against demons and principalities, and claim and teach that we will have victory over them? This is applying Scripture as a technique, and ignores the fact that Christianity is a life to be lived in the Spirit.

The whole armour of God

It is impossible to have authority over the devil if you are not walking on the road of the Cross and allowing the Lord to purify you and to deal with your flesh. You can quote every Scripture, bind every demon, confess every verse, claim authority over everything, and bind and loose as much as you want. If your life is in a mess, and is not on the foundation of Christ and Him crucified, the enemy will not flee when you attempt to resist him; on the contrary, he will get you to fall into sin and defeat you.

Many messages have been preached, and books written, about 'putting on the whole armour of God'. Surely this cannot be a physical principle, neither can it be about quoting Scripture, binding demons, etc. In fact, it is not about words at all. Our spiritual armour is to be found in the state of our heart, the faith we carry, the revelation of the Gospel in our hearts, our righteous living, the spirit of prayer. Our authority rests in the quality of our spiritual life. Victory lies on the road of the Cross!

So, what does ‘Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might’ really mean for our daily lives? If we combine what Paul and James have to say, it is when we place our lives in the mighty hand of the Lord. It is when we open our hearts to the revelation of the Gospel and allow Him to work in us, leading to a life of faith, righteousness, prayer, etc. In other words, we put on the whole armour of God. Thus we experience victory without having to fight evil spirits all day long.

And, when the devil comes, we need only resist him and nothing more. That is the call, dear brothers and sisters. It is not to enter into spiritual warfare against demons...

When our lives are on the right foundation, we carry the authority of God to resist the devil. Whenever he attacks, and we resist him, the devil has no option but to flee. We all agree that demons and evil spirits are real, but Jesus Christ has defeated them all (Colossians 2:15). That is why, if our lives are submitted to God, we will not have to fear demons, nor look for them everywhere.

The authority of God

Let us now consider Matthew 16:18-19. Jesus says: *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the*

keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Our Lord gave Peter the authority to lead His Church. He is saying, ‘Whatever you decide and declare on earth according to My Plan and My Will, for the good of the Kingdom, I will back you in heaven, and I will bring it to pass.’

An example of this authority in action is seen in Acts 5. As a man of faith and prayer, living a pure and righteous life, Peter wore the armour of God, and was directed by the Holy Spirit to speak according to God’s Will. He discerned what Ananias and Sapphira had done, and spoke with the authority of God. What he bound on earth was bound in heaven. I see Peter exercising both his leadership role, and the authority given to him by the Lord.

Because Peter had acted for the benefit of the Kingdom, God approved and brought to pass what he had declared. We all know what happened afterwards... the Church walked in the fear of God.

Apostle Paul also took similar action for the benefit of the Kingdom when he delivered Christians over to Satan (see 1 Corinthians 5:5; and 1 Timothy 1:20). Whatever you and I declare in the Spirit according to His Will, God will bring to pass. Why? Because we have been given the authority to act on His behalf for the building of His Church, as long as our hearts remain pure, and our lives are in order.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul declares: *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...”* His ministry was under attack and being undermined by accusations. Paul did not respond in the flesh because he knew it was a spiritual issue (see verse 8). He did not say, ‘These guys are badmouthing me, let me get into an argument with them.’ He told the Corinthians: ‘I’m not going to justify myself. I will come and preach the Gospel to you, so that you can feel who I am, and my heart for you.’ Paul trusted in the authority he carried; that the power of the Gospel would win their hearts, and that they would stand together in unity for the Gospel once again.

Our weapons are not carnal, they are mighty in God through the authority we have in the Gospel. Here again, Paul did not enter into spiritual warfare. His defence was his life and the revelation of the Gospel he carried.

Resisting the devil

Sometimes, we need to resist the devil, to oppose him, to stop him in his work. But this cannot be a technique applied to our daily lives.

When Paul was put in prison with Silas, they did not begin a session of spiritual warfare, rather the Bible talks about them praising God.

There was no need to bind any demons or spirits in order to be freed. Their hearts were right, their lives were in order and they worshipped God, believing that their deliverance was at hand. Soon after, God shook the prison and delivered them. When Paul came to Athens, the Bible says he was shocked by the statues, the idols, and the gods they worshipped. Did the Apostle start to bind demons? No! He spoke clearly, stating that they worshipped all sorts of gods, but he would tell them about the One they should worship. He talked about his God, and he preached to them about Jesus Christ.

When we go through the book of Acts, we see that the disciples spent their time preaching the Gospel. When situations arose where they needed to resist the enemy, they did so and continued with the work of the ministry. Let us not get distracted or spend more time being concerned by demons, instead of living and sharing the Gospel, and serving Jesus Christ with all our hearts.

Chapter VI

Relationships Before Marriage

If there is one area in the Church today where there exists much confusion, and where there is evidence that the world system has once again crept in and influenced the way Christians think and behave, it is in relationships before marriage. Although this topic might seem only to apply to young people about to get married, it is actually something that is relevant to all believers.

On this particular issue, the Church seems to have decided to take extreme opposite views. Today, we see either legalism or total leniency. In some churches there are laws about what people can and cannot do while in others, the issue is not addressed at all. Neither of the two is right!

I sincerely believe that the Church has abandoned its responsibility by not taking a clear Scriptural position concerning the way Christians, and young people in particular, should be living the true Christian life, whether it be before or after marriage. By allowing the world's standards and mentality into the Church without reacting, we have stopped standing for the Truth of the Gospel, and have compromised. The result is that Christians are entering into relationships that are not spiritual and that do not help them grow and serve the Lord in the right way and often leading them into sin and away from the plan of God for their lives.

I know from experience that when the Gospel takes hold of young people, they don't struggle, or feel any pressure or confusion as to

what is allowed in their relationships with each other, or where to draw the line. On the contrary, they do not need rules to tell them what they can or cannot do. They understand clearly God's plan for their lives and desire to do God's will, remain pure, and walk in a way pleasing to Him.

When we consider God's Word from His perspective, I am convinced that our concepts of dating, girlfriends and boyfriends, and relationships will be turned upside down!

In today's world, intimate physical relationships before and outside of marriage are considered acceptable and are even encouraged. Dating and being engaged have become time-honoured rituals that are a period for both parties to see if they really 'fit' together. This usually leads to intimate physical relationships.

Sadly, in many churches, young people in particular are adopting the same approach, and those in authority – church leadership, parents, etc. – appear reluctant to address the issue seriously enough. Young people today are therefore left to judge for themselves where to draw the line in this sensitive area, instead of being given clear, Biblical directives.

Let us be clear from the start, there can be no confusion with God; His Word is not ambiguous. In it, we see a clearly defined vision and plan for His people and His Church. He definitely does not want us to compromise with the world and its ways. Neither does God want

law and legalism in His Church, which have no power to change lives. What He wants is for all Christians to be convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which draws a clear line and shows us on what foundation we should stand. That is why I believe we need to go back to the foundation – God’s Word – to see what He has to say on this matter.

Our bodies are members of Christ

Let us look at how God views marriage, and relationships outside marriage, and we will see that any physical relationship outside marriage, of whatever degree, is considered sin in the eyes of God. It is not a question of, ‘Where do we draw the line?’ because if we do try to draw a line somewhere, it will almost certainly be crossed. Just as an old advert for car brakes once declared, ‘Never start something you can’t stop!’

1 Corinthians 6:15 states: *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!”* Therefore, it is not only our spirit that is one with Christ; our whole being is one with Him. Verse 16-17, *“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two’, He says, ‘shall become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”*

Paul is saying here clearly that it is the sexual act that makes two people become one flesh, and this should be taken seriously. We cannot ever forget that our spirit, soul and body are one with Jesus Christ. Many Christians today are doing as they please with their bodies, without realising the spiritual implications of their actions. In this passage, Paul makes a clear distinction between the sin of the body and other sins; with immorality, you sin against your own body because you become one with the person you are physically intimate with. Immorality means any physical relationship outside of marriage. Lying, stealing, anger, etc. are different; these are the fruits of our flesh.

If God has chosen to make a distinction between sin in our bodies and any other sin, then we should pay careful attention, and understand His heart for us on this issue. Verse 18 says: *“Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.”* We must not forget that our body is one with Christ as well as our spirit, and committing sexual immorality, therefore, is serious in the eyes of God. Verse 19-20 reminds us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are exhorted to: *“...glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

The flesh should be crucified

In Galatians 5:24-25, Paul declares: *“And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”* Every Christian has at least a basic understanding of what this Scripture signifies. But for those who desire to walk in the spirit, and are about to get married, how much more applicable it is to their lives.

We are called to crucify our flesh and its desires. That is why we need to hear the message of the Cross all the time because it reminds us to deny ourselves and lose our lives. There is no room to deceive one another, no place to try things out... We are a chosen people whose bodies belong to our Lord Jesus Christ.

How can we think therefore, that it could now be right for a couple, formally engaged or otherwise, to do things that are only permitted for a husband and wife, just because they have settled on a choice of spouse? A commitment to marriage at some point in the future should continue to mean total respect for each other before the Lord. Until the day a couple are married, the Lord wants them to live a chaste and holy life.

Young people, pay careful attention... Unless you have a conviction in your heart that it is of God, do not even enter a relationship. If your

desire is to know His plan, and the person He has set aside for you as spouse, you can be certain that He will reveal it to you.

Once you know it is God's plan for you both to get married, and you are convinced of the chaste lifestyle you should lead before the wedding, there is no danger. You can get engaged and respect each other as brother and sister in the Lord, because there is a conviction in your hearts that you should live a chaste life pleasing to Him before you get married. You will carry a holy reverence for the presence of God in your future spouse's life and become an example to others.

That is why you need to be convicted by what God says, so that nothing is left to chance. Is any form of physical relationship acceptable before marriage? Most certainly not! God's Word is very clear on this subject.

The fragrance of a pure and holy relationship

Maybe you are already in a physical relationship outside or before marriage, and the Lord is convicting you that it is not right. My advice is to repent and make a firm decision to stop all physical intimacy immediately; and do not look back. It is not something that can be done by degrees, neither is it something that you can take lightly. God's grace is there to help you. And if you both know in your hearts

that you are meant to marry each other, then until that day, preserve yourselves, respect each other as a brother respects any sister in church, and in so doing lead a pure and chaste life.

The preaching of the Cross of Jesus Christ provides an answer to, and draws a clearly defined line on every issue that we face in our lives. It enables us to walk by conviction, and we will walk in victory as a result. Christians of every age, married or not, need to listen carefully to what God is saying in His Word in order to live a righteous life and become examples to others. Isn't it glorious when your heart testifies to the fact that there is absolute purity in the relationship of a couple who are to marry? This gives off a good and pleasing fragrance. What a great testimony to the power of the Gospel when two people get married on this foundation!

I believe that this is the plan of God for His Church and for His children. There is no need to be discouraged, God is alive. He can bring two people together. He knows the future. He knows everything about our lives, and His desire is for us to live a pure and holy life. That is why it is better to be patient, than to try things out. Open your heart; let God speak to you and convict you. It is never too late with Jesus Christ. Today can be your day to declare to the Lord that you are going to live your Christian life before marriage in accordance with His Word.

Chapter VII

The Road is Narrow

It is true that I have often been accused of putting too much emphasis on the message of the Cross, and of preaching little else, at a time when one hears very little about this subject from the pulpit. Yet, I would answer with a question of my own: ‘Why shouldn’t the foundational message of Jesus Christ – what the early apostles taught, what you read in the epistles of Paul, James, John, and Peter – be preached in every church everywhere, all the time?’ The preaching of the message of the Cross is the basic message of Christianity!

I believe very strongly that every pastor should desire to bring the heart of each Christian to the place where he can see his need for the Lord to work in his heart and in his life and, where he allows himself to be dealt with by God. That way, he can grow into the image of Christ and carry the life of Christ in him. This is why it is absolutely necessary to preach the message of the Cross, the foundational message of our Christian life. I remain convinced from my own experience that you can never preach it enough; because as believers, we all need the confrontation that this truth brings, everyday of our lives.

There are too many Christians who abandon their faith because they don’t hear the right gospel. We can see in God’s Word, from the example of the Early Church, that the presence of genuine Apostles preaching the true Gospel, kept it standing on the right foundation and in sound doctrine. Jesus Himself made an unequivocal statement about the Christian life when he spoke about the narrow gate. Why is the preaching of the message of the Cross absent from the Church today?

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it...” Matthew 7:13.

The life that Jesus talks about in this passage of Scripture is, of course, spiritual life. All Christians, therefore, should be eager to listen carefully to what Jesus has to say. Our Lord is showing us the path we must take if we want to avoid ‘destruction’, and all the other negative consequences of not obeying Him. If you believe that the Christian life is an easy one of continuous blessing and prosperity – a painless Christianity – then you have misunderstood the words of Jesus, and the testimony of His life. The Book of Acts and the Epistles show that the believers of the Early Church went through extremely difficult situations; tests, trials, suffering and persecution all tested their faith on this difficult and narrow road.

Suffering for growth

If we wish to live the resurrection life, the life of Christ, the life of the Spirit, then we must accept that we are called to walk on a path that includes difficulties; a road that includes suffering and pain. I am not saying that it is necessary to go through physical pain, I am speaking rather about the pain that comes when God Himself takes hold of our

lives and begins to deal with us – our character, our flesh, our selfish desires and motives – and we accept to be broken and humbled in everything we are, so that, by His Grace, we begin to grow and are gradually conformed to the image of Christ. In Colossians 1:24, Apostle Paul gives us an insight into why he was willing to pay the price of suffering: *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the Church...”* The Christian who runs from this challenge and who does not accept the work of Christ in his life cannot expect to grow much in spiritual maturity. He is destined to remain a baby in spiritual terms.

The work of sanctification

The reason God asks us to walk on this narrow road is that this is where His work of sanctification will be accomplished in our lives. The suffering we go through by His hand is not designed to crush or destroy us. If we try to evade the pain and the suffering, we are likely to end up being crushed by the very situation we were trying to avoid in the first place. Many of us want to do great things for God, but we find it hard to accept that, for most of the people He uses in a mighty way, He first has to do a deep work in their lives. Let us consider the great men of God of the Old Testament who are mentioned in Hebrews 11. They all went through confrontation, trials, suffering, persecution, and

being corrected by God: the testing of their faith. And, what was the result? They became great men of the Spirit, heroes of the faith. The same God is calling us to walk that same narrow road today.

Paying the price

Do you believe that Abraham was full of joy when he decided to obey God and sacrifice his son? He must have suffered greatly as he journeyed to the place of sacrifice with Isaac; but he chose to obey God's plan for his life, and God rewarded him. Did Moses pay a price when he chose to consider the sufferings of Christ and endure affliction along with His people, instead of enjoying the treasures of Egypt? Was Abel sad when he understood that he had to bring the firstborn of his flock? Consider Noah, was he discouraged because everyone ignored and mocked him? No! These men obeyed God, they went through tests and suffering and paid the price. In their hearts, they were willing to walk on the narrow road; their faith was strengthened, and they found favour with God as a result. Today, we identify our lives with the sufferings and the death of Christ, because we are called to walk on that same difficult path, and we cannot avoid it.

Tests and trials

I believe that there is no more apt description of this calling than in Philippians 1:29, where Paul states: *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...”* In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, he goes on to speak about being, *“...hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”* Elsewhere, Apostle James talks about the tests and trials of our faith.

That is precisely what we can expect on the narrow road. Like Paul, we find ourselves hard pressed on every side but we still keep going; confused, but still hoping in God; rejected because of Jesus, but still able to rejoice. We know that we too have to go through these things, just as Jesus, the Apostles, and the Christians of the Early Church did; it is our share and our portion. This is true Christianity! As soon as we decide to follow Christ, we will be called to identify our life with His sufferings. Jesus warned us very clearly that this would be the case. But, when everything appears dark and hopeless around us, let us remember that there is a purpose to it all. We shall see the deliverance of our God and shall grow in Him.

The purpose of suffering

Hebrews 12:4 states: *“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”* In other words, you have not yet come to the point in your heart, where you are utterly sick and tired of sin. 1 Peter 4 declares: *“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”* In order to grasp what is being said in these verses, it is imperative we catch the spirit of the Gospel. Otherwise, we will easily miss the point of why, as Christians, we are asked to partake of His sufferings. Surely Jesus did not simply want us to go through suffering and hardship for its own sake.

There has to be a purpose, an aim to it all. The fruit of this lifestyle is the life of Christ in us; that we might be conformed to His image. Paul says in Philippians 2: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...”* in other words, have the same attitude as Jesus, when He humbled Himself and experienced the death of the Cross. The end result is that God highly exalted Him.

Becoming an example

Finally, let us consider Hebrews 12:5-6, where we are exhorted not to despise the chastening of the Lord, because He is treating us as sons

and daughters... If we want to be considered as a son in the house and have the approval of God our Father, then we must be open to His dealings and His correction. The author ends the chapter on the pain of chastisement; it is not a time for rejoicing, it is tough when God breaks you and moulds you, and is at work in your life, but this yields the fruit of righteousness, a holy life; the fruit of sanctification. In taking the narrow road, we must accept that it is something God has designed for us, so that we can be an example and a model to the world.

The process of sanctification

This is the process of sanctification. We are being purified, becoming more and more like Christ. It is on the narrow road, with all its rebuking, chastening and correcting - which is described as being for 'our profit' - that we are assured of being "*partakers of His holiness,*" and "*bearing the peaceable fruit of righteousness,*" Hebrews 12:10-11.

There is no other way to deal with our sin than by identifying our lives with Christ's sufferings. We can be confident that we will mature as Christians and become spiritual people if we take the narrow road, and stay on it. It is the secret to a victorious life.

As a people, we, the Church, need to change our attitude, and stop trying to avoid the narrow road. It is part of God's wonderful plan for our lives. Then, like the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, we can rest assured that we will stand firm, and finish the race. We must not forget that the narrow road is the one that leads to eternal life!

Chapter VIII

The Church will be Confronted

When we look at the state of the Church today, I am sure that many Christians are saddened by what they see. In many ways, there is little difference between the behaviour of 21st century believers and what went on with the people of Israel during the time of Jeremiah and the other Old Testament prophets. It seems that, once again, God's people are being led to run after things that do not profit them.

In those days, out of His love for His people, God sent men to warn them about the dangers of what they were doing and the consequences of continually defying Him. Today, we are blessed with having God's Word, the Bible, to warn, encourage, and exhort us. In addition, we have the example of Jesus Christ, as well as that of the Early Church to help keep us on the 'narrow road'.

More importantly, we have the message of the Cross – the power of God – that equips us to walk victorious lives and keep sound doctrine. So, it is genuinely sad to see Christians seeking after 'superficial' blessings when the 'power of God' is available to them. The testimony of a weak, divided Church is surely not one that can please the Lord. Unless the Church returns to the foundational message of Christianity, it will continue to be swept along by every wind of doctrine.

I'm convinced that God wants to bring a word of warning about what is happening in the Church today. The Church is going to be confronted: in its ways, in its preaching and teachings, and in the manner Christians are being encouraged to lead their lives. My

conviction is that through the preaching of the message of the Cross, God's people will be confronted.

During his lifetime, the prophet Jeremiah, instructed by God, never ceased to warn Israel about what would happen if they continued in their wicked ways. At that time, they were running after many other things instead of God. Jeremiah 1:9 reads: *"...Behold, I have put My Words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms; to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."* We would all agree that warnings usually come when things need to change. In these last days, I believe that the Church will be confronted over the way it serves the Lord, and over the things to which the hearts of God's people are being drawn!

The Word of God itself speaks of past events being referred to as a warning for future generations. In 1 Corinthians 10:11, for example, we see Apostle Paul declaring that all that was written with regard to the experiences of the Israelites in the desert was recorded for our benefit, as New Covenant believers: *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."* We are living in a time where a superficial spiritual life, or being tossed about by every wind of doctrine, is no longer an option. Otherwise we will soon find ourselves being caught up by the world, by deceptive teachings, and falling into the enemy's trap.

Things that do not profit

We know what happened to the nation of Israel as a result of their disobedience and rebellion. Yet they, and their spiritual leaders, received warning after warning. In Jeremiah 2:8, God plainly reproaches them for seeking things that will not profit them: *“The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.”* God then repeats His accusation in verse 11: *“Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit.”*

I am sure that you realise that material things cannot change us in the Spirit, or bring us to maturity and perfection in Christ! That is why it is time for the Church to be confronted with the message of the Cross of Jesus Christ; the one Gospel that deals with the flesh, confronts our lives and the state of our hearts; and which causes us to desire things of the Spirit that will profit us. In verse 13, God rebukes His people: *“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.”* A broken cistern is of little use. In the same way today, we are building our lives in vain by seeking things that we have been led to believe Christ will give us, instead of seeking His life, the resurrection life, the life of the Spirit.

I have nothing against those whom God Himself chooses to bless and prosper, especially when I know that their hearts' desire is to bless the Kingdom in return. But, I do have a problem when Christians are encouraged to seek material things instead of the life of the Spirit. After all, nowhere in the Bible are we encouraged to seek material things; on the contrary, in Colossians 3:1-2 we are specifically directed by Paul: *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."*

Rebuke and confrontation

Evidently, not everyone will accept rebuke with a repentant heart. God forewarned Jeremiah that the message he was to bring to the people would create a lot of opposition. Jeremiah 1:19 reads: *"They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you."* The Israelites had a serious issue with what he was proclaiming; the fact that he claimed what he was saying came from God. Because their hearts were far from God, the people of Israel refused to listen; they were content to run after other things that satisfied their flesh. The result was that they resisted Jeremiah for 40 years! The Church of Jesus Christ today is in something of a similar state: God's people are being encouraged to seek things that cannot profit them spiritually. In the same way, whenever the Cross of Jesus is preached, it shines

as a light in the Church today, it confronts, and not surprisingly, many do not like it.

The Cross is the foundation

When preachers make a doctrine out of superficial things, they remove any desire from the heart of believers to grow spiritually. The Cross of Jesus Christ should be an integral part of the way of life of those standing behind the pulpit. And, Christians should be able to testify to that; that these men have been, and are being, broken by God; that they have become examples, models and, that they are not just imparting Biblical knowledge. That is why the message of the Cross needs to come back to the Church now, so that the hearts of Christians are brought back to Christ; to identifying their lives with Him in His sufferings, and in His death. This is the only way to partake of resurrection life, which is Christ living His life in you and me... the hope of glory!

There is the element of suffering and death that is often absent from the Church today; that is the message of the Cross. We cannot run away from it. A Christianity that is only about coming to church, being blessed, and having a 'happy-clappy' time with your friends before giving your offering is, frankly, just religion! Unfortunately, much as it saddens me, I believe that a good deal of what goes on in the

Church today is merely religion; techniques, principles, methods, all from man's wisdom... What is even sadder is that in far too many churches, money is the basis of everything.

The Bible declares unequivocally that the message of the Cross is the foundation of our Christian life. There is so much more in the Word of God for our spiritual lives than just continually preaching about prosperity, money, giving, and blessings.

Ten thousand instructors

In 1 Corinthians 4:14-15, Paul addresses the backslidden and carnal Corinthians with a reminder and a warning: *"I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel."* Wherever he went, he laid only one foundation and preached the same Gospel in all the churches: the Gospel of the Cross. These Corinthians understood exactly what God expected of them, and the work that He needed to accomplish in them, to become disciples, servants, and examples to the world around them.

When the Cross is missing, the door is open for our hearts to be drawn to things of no eternal value. That is what had happened to

the Corinthians. They had listened to many gospels: *“You might have ten thousand instructors.”* In verse 15, Paul was saying in effect: ‘You have listened to many preachers, heard many doctrines, learnt many techniques, but look at your state... there is fighting, jealousy and immorality among you!’ As soon as you remove the foundation of the Cross, the result will be Christians walking in the flesh; backslidden and defeated!

Begotten in the Gospel

When you are not begotten in the True Gospel, you will interpret the Bible for your own benefit. You will not want to hear about tests and trials, afflictions, suffering; about being rebuked, correction, and repentance; about dying to self. A good example of this is when certain Christians quote Philippians 4:13: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* All that they emphasise is the first part of this verse: *“I can do all things”*.

But let us look at the entire context by beginning at verse 10: *“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both*

to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

In context, we see something altogether different, a clear reference to Paul taking up his cross. To him, whatever the circumstances – in plenty or in lack – and with a humble heart, God’s grace and God’s strength will take him through them. This grace will be present in all situations, good or bad. That is the spirit, the heart, behind what Paul is expressing here; this is the heart of Christ, the spirit of the Gospel.

Knowing Christ

Without being begotten in the true Gospel, you will struggle to accept what God wants for you. Your flesh will want to hold onto natural things, and prevent you from identifying your life fully with Christ. In Philippians 3:10-11, Paul states: *“that I may know Him and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

As Christians today, how can we say that we want to know Christ without being ready to identify our lives with Him? Just as it was for Paul, so it is the same for us, in the fellowship of His suffering, so that we might partake of resurrection life. Otherwise we are

speaking only of the born-again experience. Yet, we cannot stop there... For in verse 15, Paul goes much further than being born-again. He encourages us to have an attitude where, even if we do not understand fully or agree with the revelation of Christ and how we are called to identify our lives with Him, in His suffering, His death and in His resurrection, we can still trust God to reveal to us what He needs to.

The Cross in your life

I urge you therefore, give God an opportunity, through Jesus Christ, to reveal the rightful place of His Cross in your life, as He declares in Matthew 16:24: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”* Our Christian life should have only one foundation: *“Jesus Christ and Him crucified!”*

Chapter IX

Jesus is Calling Again

It is human nature to want to be comfortable and satisfied, not wanting to upset the status quo. As Christians we can have the same attitude towards our walk with the Lord; comfortable, easygoing, and settled in a particular Christian lifestyle.

I genuinely believe that another move of God is coming very soon and that Christians need to be aware of what is ahead. We must bear in mind that every move of God comes with a shaking. At first our flesh will want to resist this. But those who earnestly desire to serve God and follow Him, will be ready to accept whatever He asks. We must ensure that, whether we are pastors, leaders, or 'ordinary' Christians, we seek the Lord and find out what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today.

Without a doubt, God is calling us to bring a message that will feed His people; that will lead them to maturity and freedom in Christ. If Jesus is coming back soon, it will not be for a powerless or unrighteous Church. The message of the Cross is the only gospel with the power to transform the Church, and the lives of Christians; able to bring them to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Throughout the whole of the history of the Church, there have been times and seasons when God has called men and women for different purposes in order to accomplish His will here on earth. I am convinced that now is a time that Jesus is calling Christians to embrace a specific message, a revelation: the message of the Cross, the foundational doctrine of Christianity.

Jesus has a plan and a vision for His Church, and He wants it to be fulfilled. Unfortunately, when He calls, not everyone listens or pays attention... But this does not stop Him, because His plan will be accomplished. It is unlikely that Jesus will return for a Church that is dull and lifeless; and even less for one that is comfortable, self-satisfied, or religious. He will handpick men and women; and call them, and challenge them, in the same way that He chose 12 disciples to start the Church. He also called Apostle Paul for a specific purpose: *“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...”* See Galatians 1:15-16.

When the time comes to do something in God’s calendar, He does it. Over the last 40 or 50 years, God brought new revelation to His Church; it was good and we praise Him for it. But what do we see today? A Church that has lost its power, its holiness, and that is no longer separated from the world. What has replaced it? Compromise, sin, false doctrine, and emotional manipulation! But, once again, Jesus is calling men and women to whom He will reveal the true message of the Cross, so that they can live real victorious lives, and preach this Gospel and defend it. It is not a coincidence, therefore, if you are feeling that there must be something more to the Christian life than just being comfortable and accepting everything that comes and goes in the Church today.

Something new

The Holy Spirit is knocking at the door of many believers' hearts; leaders of churches, men and women, all over the world; people who are tired and not willing to accept that this is all there is to the Church of Jesus Christ. I strongly believe that there is something new, something good, that the Holy Spirit is about to say to the hearts of these Christians. He is already at work, preparing hearts to respond to the Gospel of the Cross of Jesus Christ, even though we may not be able to see it. I am convinced that many Christians have sensed deep down that something fresh, something different, is on its way.

Some of you might even have felt that these thoughts are rebellious, or that you are being independent in disagreeing with much of what is preached from the pulpit today. You are asking yourselves questions... about your Christian life, and the state of your heart. This is Jesus calling! We are not speaking about a call to ministry here, but about Jesus calling you as an individual believer to live out the true Gospel, to allow God to complete the good work He has begun in you.

Enemies of the Cross

But, just as in the days of Apostle Paul, many will hear and oppose the preaching of this message and will become enemies of the Cross;

see Philippians 3:18: *“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ...”* Sadly, not all preachers or Christians are ready to accept the message of the Cross and the challenge that the Christian lifestyle brings.

There will always be people within the Church who will rise up and oppose what God wants to do when He moves. From the time of Luther during the Reformation till today, opposition has existed within the Church; enemies have resisted what God wanted to do in His Church. Consequently, we will encounter those who believe it is their religious duty to oppose the preaching of the message of the Cross.

The Cross and nothing else

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:2: *“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”* The message of the Cross is the foundation of Christianity; it was this Gospel that challenged the believers of the Book of Acts. Today, Jesus is calling again. In the same way as in Galatians 1:11, where Paul speaks about the revelation that he received directly from Jesus Christ, I believe He is choosing men and women, setting them apart, preparing their hearts and revealing the message of the Cross to them.

This message is the same revelation that was present in the Early Church; it calls on Christians to respond and surrender; to consider their lives as lost and no longer to hold onto anything. This heartfelt conviction only comes about through the preaching of the Cross. Men and women will then start to read the Scriptures and identify with what they read. Church leaders will openly acknowledge their state, and what God needs to do in their own lives, from the pulpit. Christians of all ages and backgrounds will start understanding that true Christianity is about losing our lives so that Jesus can live in us. Increasingly, pastors and the flock will come to accept that this Gospel is what is lacking in the Church today.

Not a new message

Jesus taught that the road is narrow and that there is a price to pay to follow Him, which includes denying oneself, suffering, persecution, and losing one's life. As Christians begin to grasp that God wants to mould them into the image of His Son, they will be ready to accept the work He wants to do in their lives. As a Church, we will realise that our walk is not about us, but about Him – Jesus living in us; about total identification with Him. In Romans 6:3-4, Paul declares that we were buried with Christ through baptism, and that we should walk in newness of life, just as Christ was raised from the dead. When we partake of His death, we then partake of His resurrection. This

is newness of life; this is the life of Christ! This is the life of victory that Jesus is calling us to... the fullness of Christ in us! This was the message the first Apostles preached, which the Early Church lived. It is not new; you will find it in every version of the Bible.

Making a choice

Many people are going to start hearing the call and be faced with a choice. Some will hear and oppose the call, but many will hear and respond. To them, Christ will reveal the true Gospel and their need to identify with Him. Despite opposition and persecution, when they begin to sense Jesus calling, they will be filled with a desire to live out this call. Their mind may seek to reason, but their hearts will say, 'Yes Lord! I am ready to pay the price to follow you, to live this Gospel; to become clay in the hands of the potter; to be changed, shaken, transformed; to become like you, Lord Jesus.' They will look for others who live and preach the message of the Cross. They will see a clear dividing line between the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and all the other gospels being preached and lived.

Only by God's grace

In Philippians 1, Apostle Paul declares that he was called to defend the Gospel. In answering Jesus' call, you too will have to take a stand and say: 'This is not right; that is not sound doctrine!' You will have to face persecutors and opposition, but by God's grace you will be able to. That is how Paul was able to state: *"But by the grace of God I am what I am... but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*

Answering His call

Today Jesus is calling again. He is knocking at the door of your heart and He is preparing you to be ready for that call. What a privilege, what an honour! Are you ready to answer His call?

The Church Needs to Know

Let us all acknowledge that the Church has deviated somewhat from sound doctrine, with the resultant effect on the lives of God's people.

Many leaders have been influenced by prosperity teachings in recent years, and are seeking to gain for themselves. Others do not realise that the preaching of the Cross is the power of God to bring Christians to spiritual maturity.

It is time to address some key issues directly, so that Christians may realise that the Lord has better things in store for them, so that they can walk in freedom and in victory!



Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) is an informal Christian network, formed in 2001 by a team of leaders from various African countries who are united by the message of the cross and the work of God in their lives.

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