

THE
House
CHURCH



eBook Series:
Issues Facing the Churches

David Cloud

The House Church Movement
Copyright 2012 by David W. Cloud
ISBN 978-1-58318-137-9



Published by Way of Life Literature
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866-295-4143 (toll free) - fbns@wayoflife.org
www.wayoflife.org

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Printed in Canada by
Bethel Baptist Print Ministry

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
The Many Faces of the House Church Movement	5
Motivations for the House Church Movement	11
The Challenge of the House Church Movement	13
The Agenda of the House Church Movement	44
The Heretical Jungle of the House Church Movement	53
Scriptures Misused by the House Church Movement	102
The Legalism of the House Church Movement	108
The Doctrine of Apostasy: A Glaring Omission in House Church Writings.....	115
Frank Viola and the Organic Church.....	196
The Integrated Church and Vision Forum	233
Powerful Publications for These Times.....	248

Introduction

The house church movement is large and is growing rapidly.

It is also called simple church, open church, integrated church, micro church, and organic church.

According to Barna research, there are 11 million people involved in the house church movement in the United States, with 70 million having experimented with it.

A Church in a House vs. the House Church Movement

There is nothing unscriptural about a church that meets in a house. Churches have met in homes since the first century, and if that were the essence of the house church movement we would have nothing negative to say about it.

A scriptural church can meet in a house, a barn, a storefront, a cave, a forest, or its own building. Where a church meets is irrelevant. The important issue is whether or not the church is established along scriptural lines.

As we will see, the house church movement is not merely about churches meeting in houses.

The Many Faces of the House Church Movement

In one sense it is difficult to speak in generalities about the “house church movement” since it has many faces, but we have made an earnest effort to understand it “from the horse’s mouth.” For this report I read over 25 books, including the following, in addition to internet research:

- *An Army of Ordinary People* by Felicity Dale
- *House Church* edited by Steve Atkerson
- *House to House* by Larry Kreider
- *Organic Church* by Neil Cole
- *The Church in the House* by Robert Fitts
- *Starting a House Church* by Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung
- *Waking the Dead* by John Eldredge
- *The House Church Book* by Wolfgang Simson
- *Jesus Manifesto* by Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola
- *Grace Walk* by Steve McVey
- *52 Lies Heard in Church Every Sunday* by Steve McVey
- *Reimagining Church* by Frank Viola
- *Pagan Christianity* by Frank Viola and George Barna
- *The Rabbit and the Elephant* by Tony and Felicity Dale
- *Planting Churches That Reproduce* by Joel Comiskey

The “house church” presented in these books is not one thing. It is a multiplicity of things and represents a multiplicity of doctrine. It is a jungle of heresies and legalism under the guise of a new “liberty” and a new “wineskin.”

The following are four major categories of house churches, though there are many overlaps.

Please understand that if what I am describing does not fit your particular “house church,” then I am not talking about you! I realize that there are biblical churches that meet in houses and that are not guilty of these errors.

1. The no-pastor house church

A large number of house churches are organized around the principle of being opposed to pastoral authority. The rejection of pastoral authority runs the gamut from Frank Viola’s denunciation of every type of pastor/elder to Steve Atkerson’s allowance for a teaching pastor but not a ruling pastor to Wolfgang Simson’s non-authoritative “elder” that is under the direction of apostles and prophets.

“Although all house churches are different, and they decide individually how they want to do things, in general there are no ‘pastors.’ At least there doesn’t need to be. We believe that the Holy Spirit can use any believer to teach or encourage the group. In a house church, everyone is expected to participate and be looking for ways to use the gifts the Holy Spirit provides (see 1 Cor. 14:26). Certainly there is usually a facilitator of the group (although it doesn’t need to be the same person that facilitates from meeting to meeting). We believe that even a new believer could start a church in their home without feeling like they need a trained professional to come and lead it, or needing money to support such a person. We find that the lack of a specified pastor encourages every person in the group to look for answers by searching the Scriptures and looking to the Holy Spirit, rather than depending on the pastor to interpret” (“Does a House Church Need a Leader or Pastor?” HouseToHouse.com).

In connection with the rejection of authoritative church leadership, many house churches promote “open participation” services and despise traditional preaching/teaching. House2House says, “1 Corinthians 14:26 is the basis for what we do when we get together. The key is ‘each one has...’ Everybody should be able to take part. ... [Bible study is to be] interactive.”

These types of house churches emphasize the necessity of keeping the church small. House2House says, “The experts claim that 15-20 adults is the maximum number that you should let a house church grow to” (House2House FAQ).

These types of house churches tend to be composed more of disgruntled members from various churches than converts won directly by the house church itself. They criticize the “traditional” churches, but they aren’t making a major contribution to the fulfillment of the Great Commission themselves.

2. The evangelistic house church

Another segment of house churches are devoted to evangelism. All of the house churches believe in evangelism to some extent, but some have a major passion to keep the church informal and simple in order to multiply it more widely and reach more people for Christ. Some of these types of house churches do believe in pastors.

For example, Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung, in *Starting a House Church*, and Joel Comiskey in *Planting Churches that Reproduce*, support the concept of biblical pastor/elders who provide real leadership (though in typical emerging “facing both ways” fashion they weaken and even contradict this position by associating with proponents of house churches that don’t have such leaders).

3. The latter rain apostolic revival house churches.

Many of the house churches are associated with the leaders of the Pentecostal-Charismatic latter rain apostolic revival movement. They expect the return of Christ to be preceded

by a miracle-driven revival that will surpass even that of the first century. Churches will be unified; prophets and apostles will operate in sign wonders; there will be a great ingathering of souls; the kingdom of God will be established through many segments of society. This is called dominionist or kingdom now theology.

House church proponents who hold this theology include Larry Kreider, Chuck Pierce, Rick Joyner, Wolfgang Simson, and C. Peter Wagner.

Pierce describes their vision in his foreword to Larry Kreider's 2008 book *House to House*:

"The time has come again for a great new move of God to sweep the earth. Several years ago, the Lord asked me to help realign His Body to create a new order in preparation for this move to begin. He had revealed to me that we were entering a new war season, and in the midst of the season, there had to be a new alignment, a new method of gathering and 'doing church.' ... The Kingdom of God is moving forward! To accomplish this requires all the ascension gifts to be aligned: apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and pastors. A plan of dominion for 'this age' has been released" (Chuck Pierce, foreword to *House to House*, p. 14).

We say more about this in the chapter "The Heretical Jungle of the House Church Movement."

4. The integrated family church

Another group of house churches is devoted to a strong emphasis on the family and an "integrated" philosophy, though not all integrated churches are house churches.

The Integrated Church Movement (ICM), also called the Family Integrated Church, is defined as follows:

"The family-integrated model jettisons all age-graded ministries. Those who adhere to this model view each family

unit (single or married, with or without children) as one 'block' that comprises the local church. That is, they view the church as a family of families. They view the church's purpose as equipping the parents, primarily the fathers, to evangelize and disciple their children" (Terry Delany, "Three Perspectives on Family Ministry," March 18, 2009).

This is not an organization but a philosophy, and there are many varieties of and networks of Family Integrated churches.

Many fundamentalist home schoolers are involved in the integrated family church concept. We deal more with this in the chapter "The Integrated Church and Vision Forum."

In conclusion to this section on the many faces of the house church movement, we would hasten to add that there is a tremendous amount of overlap and interconnection. It must be remembered that the vast majority of the leaders of the house church movement are not separatists. Most are ecumenical to some degree. They believe in affiliation, not separatism. They might disagree with one another, but generally they don't reprove one another or separate from one another. Most of them are associated together in a variety of ways. House2House and SimpleChurch.com, for example, are forums or umbrellas for a wide variety of house church proponents. Within these forums men as diverse as Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet and Neil Cole and Steve Atkerson associate. The house church leaders quote one another and recommend one another's books and blogs.

And they love to network. There are countless house church networks, regional, national, and international, such as Sojourners HC Network, Worldwide Awakening Ministries, Oasis Ministries, Narrow Gate, Solomon's Porch, Cities on Hilltops, Breathing Space Ministries, Harvest-Net, Lancaster Micro-Church Network, Association of Home Churches, the

Underground, Gates of Praise, All Nations, DOVE Christian Fellowship International, and Church Multiplication Associates (CMA). There are networks of networks.

This facilitates the spread of doctrinal error. All of the heresies that we document in the book *Biblical Separatism and Its Collapse* are found in the house church movement. The book is available for free in ePUB, PDF, and Kindle formats at the Free eBooks section of the Way of Life web site -- www.wayoflife.org

Motivations for the House Church Movement

There are many reasons why the house church movement is growing.

One is apostasy and compromise. It is not wrong to reject human tradition and spiritual lifelessness and church growth techniques that have transformed churches into well-oiled machines in which the individual is a near meaningless cog, but the typical house church approach is not the answer to these problems.

A second reason why the house church concept is growing is the abuse of pastoral authority. Some churches are not merely pastor-led; they are man-venerating cults. We have often warned about this error which exists far too commonly among fundamental Baptist churches. (See “The Pastor’s Authority and the Church Member’s Responsibility” and “Unquestioning Loyalty to Pastoral Leadership the Mark of a Cult” at the Way of Life web site.)

Another reason for the rapid growth of the house church is the “me” generation’s rebellion toward authority, which is prophesied in Scripture:

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves...” (2 Timothy 3:1-2).

A more positive reason for the growth of the house church movement is the desire to see more people saved. As we have seen, some of the house churches simply want to keep the church simple because they are convinced this is the best plan for evangelism. In itself this is a noble thing, though

these house churches are all too often associated with the heresies described in the chapter “The Heretical Jungle of the House Church Movement.”

The Challenge of the House Church Movement

The Bible teaches us to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21), and some things about the house church movement could be a challenge to any New Testament congregation.

A Challenge to “One Another” Ministry

The house church movement could be a challenge in its emphasis on the “one-another” ministry which should characterize every New Testament church.

- “admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14)
- “by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13)
- “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2)
- “forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:2)
- “forgiving one another” (Eph. 4:32)
- “comfort one another” (1 Th. 4:18)
- “edify one another” (1 Th. 5:11)
- “exhort one another” (Heb. 10:24)

The church is not just a head; it is a body and each member is a necessary member. The New Testament church is a temple, and each member is a spiritual stone (1 Cor. 12:12; 1 Peter 2:5).

Ministry-gifted men--pastors, preachers, teachers, evangelists--are given to the churches to prepare the members for the work of the ministry and to protect them from the winds of false doctrine (Ephesians 4:11-16).

A godly pastor is not in the church to hinder the Spirit's working through the body of believers by exercising an oppressive type of "pastoring" that cripples godly vision and initiative on the part of members in the body. His role in the church is rather to build up the body so that it prospers spiritually and all of the various gifts are functioning within biblical boundaries and Christ can be Lord throughout the entire body to freely accomplish His work. The objective is to present every individual perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28).

Godly pastors have the goal of maturing the flock so that they can participate in the work of the Lord to the fullest extent possible. They do not want to tie the saints down unnecessarily but to liberate them to their greatest potential in Christ. Pastoral authority is "to edification, and not to destruction" (2 Cor. 13:10).

Many pastors are so jealous of their authority that they hinder and cripple the work of God by turning the ministry of the Lord into a near "one man show," and the people rise only to the level of being the servants to his vision and never mature to the true liberty in Christ that we see in Scripture. Brethren, these things ought not to be. (See "The Pastor's Authority and the Church Member's Responsibility," which is available from the Way of Life web site -- www.wayoflife.org.)

Pastors exist to oversee and lead and protect and feed, and this essential ministry should produce a church in which the members capably minister one to another to "the edifying of the body" (Eph. 4:12).

A Challenge to Refuse to Follow Tradition for Tradition's Sake

The house church movement can also be a challenge to a church to re-examine itself in light of Scripture and to refuse to follow any tradition merely for tradition's sake.

We do need to “think outside of the box” in this sense. I am not talking about adapting contemporary programs and philosophies that are contrary to Scripture. We must definitely remain within the “box” of Scripture. The box I am referring to is the box of human tradition.

It is so easy to mistake tradition for Scripture and to get into a rut. We Baptists say, “The Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice,” but all too often we fight for things that are mere human traditions (e.g., soul winning techniques, youth ministries, Sunday School programs, Vacation Bible School, Bible Colleges, Mission Boards) as fiercely as or even more fiercely than we fight for faith and practice based on solid Scripture.

The fact is that much of what we do in church is a matter of soul liberty and a matter of practicality rather than Scripture-based law.

The Bible says nothing one way or the other about Sunday School or VBS or a children's ministry or a youth ministry or a seniors' ministry or a college & career ministry.

What the Bible does say is that the churches are to preach the gospel to every creature, to teach God's people “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” and to train faithful men (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:20; 2 Tim. 2:2).

This is a big job and it is up to each church to determine how to get this job done in the context in which it finds itself and within the boundaries of Scripture (*not* within the boundaries of the Scripture's *silence*).

Sunday School is neither scriptural nor unscriptural. It is simply a program that can be used to accomplish the Lord's Great Commission or it is a program that can be a waste of time, depending on whether it is Spirit-empowered and Bible-based and taught by the right people or whether it is a lifeless religious ritual that bores people to tears. I have seen Sunday Schools that are operated both ways. The same is true for Vacation Bible School and youth ministries and other sorts of "programs."

Many "home church" or "family church" or "integrated church" people who have rejected Sunday Schools and youth ministries are as tradition-bound as those who use these ministries. They avoid these ministries "out of conviction," claiming that it is only the job of families to teach children and youth; but there is absolutely nothing in Scripture that forbids churches from teaching them.

In fact, the churches have a commission from Christ to teach everyone. Christ put no limitation on the Great Commission as far as the age of those who are to be taught the gospel and disciplined in the "all things" that Christ has delivered to us in the canon of the New Testament faith. Thus, it is not only the job of parents to teach children and youth; it is also the job of the churches, and if they decide to do this through a Sunday School or a biblically-operated youth ministry of some sort, no one can take the Bible and say this is wrong and no one can therefore rightly condemn it.

While it is wrong to have a worldly, entertainment-oriented youth ministry, because such a thing has no authority in Scripture and in fact is condemned in Scripture (e.g., “be not conformed to this world,” Romans 12:2), it is not wrong to have a “youth ministry” as such if it is properly designed and geared toward the fulfillment of such commandments as Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19-20.

I have attended several “family integrated home churches,” and I have been impressed with the following two thoughts:

First, these people are doing something good and right with their own families, something that many churches are *not* doing. To “focus on the family” in the sense of building godly homes and strong marital relationships and raising children as disciples of Christ is a wonderful, godly, scriptural thing. It is very important.

But the second thought I have typically been impressed with is that these families aren’t fulfilling the Great Commission very aggressively and their “integrated” philosophy has bound them in a legalistic trap which actually hinders the fulfillment of the Commission.

It is important that each Christian family train and disciple its own children, but children need Bible truth taught at their own level of understanding and from their unique perspective, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with a church operating a Sunday School or whatever to do this.

And what about all of the children and youth in the community that don’t have the advantage of living in a godly home? What is that “family house church” or the “integrated church” doing for them?

What about the needs of children even within the membership of the church? Are they all being properly taught at home? Is every one of the families attending the “home church” really doing an effective job of discipling its own children? Probably not. Invariably, there are some families that have their “stuff together,” while there are others attracted to the “integrated church” that are weak and that aren’t really getting the job done even with their own kids.

I think about our church plants in South Asia, where we have been missionaries since 1979. Take our youngest church. There are about 60 adult and teen members. Many of the families are broken. There are men whose Hindu wives left them to raise the children. There are women whose husbands are unsaved. There are teens whose parents are unsaved. There are unmarried young people. The church does everything it can to disciple the various groups of people who exist in these imperfect situations. We don’t get young people together to play soccer; we get them together to learn God’s Word and to show them how to find God’s will, and we have authority from Christ to do this.

There are children from Hindu families who live near the church and who attend the services. If the church didn’t provide Sunday School or children’s Bible classes of some sort, who would teach those children? They would get very little from the preaching and the poor little undisciplined things don’t know how to sit still so that they don’t distract others.

Someone might say that the church families could teach them. Sure, they can if they have a desire to do so, and more power to them if they want to do this type of thing. But the

church can also teach them! In fact, in light of Christ's Commission, the church *must* teach them.

Returning to the theme of soul liberty (meaning things not specifically forbidden in Scripture) and to the issue of practicality, most of the things we do in church services fall into this realm.

We are told to do all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40), but we are not given a specific "order of service."

We are told to pray, but we are not told specifically to have a Wednesday evening prayer service. We could have a prayer meeting on Friday or on every day of the week. When we do meet for prayer, we can meet for prayer only or for a combination of prayer and teaching and preaching and whatever. It's not spelled out in Scripture.

Each church makes these decisions before the Lord in light of its particular situation and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and when the church leaders make that determination the members obey because that is what God tells them to do, as long as the activity is not *contrary to the Bible's teaching* (Heb. 13:17). (The Bible's silence on something is not a law against it.)

We are told to preach and teach the Word, but we are not specifically told to have a preaching service on Sunday morning and Sunday evening and Wednesday or Thursday evening. Those are issues of practicality that each church decides before the Lord.

All too often traditions that start out for the right reasons deteriorate into empty lifeless rituals, and we need to guard against this.

For a church to analyze what it is doing in the light of God's Word and by seeking the Lord's guidance is important. Times change. Cultures change. Neighborhoods change. A church's composition changes. We are foolish just to continue doing things because "we have always done it that way." That is a recipe for lukewarmness leading to spiritual death.

At the same time, church traditions are not wrong in themselves as long as they are not contrary to the clear teaching of God's Word.

A Challenge about Starting New Churches

The house church movement can be a challenge to churches to be aggressive in starting new churches.

This is a very important and needed challenge. The Lord's Great Commission teaches us to set out to preach the gospel to every soul throughout the earth, beginning in our own communities (Acts 1:8), and to baptize and disciple those who believe (Mat. 28:18-20), which is done by planting churches, because it is the church which is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is the discipleship center, the preacher/teacher training center, the headquarters for world missions.

So churches must start churches. This is the wonderful pattern for world missions that the Spirit of God gave us in Acts 13-14.

Too many churches are content to exist year after year, decade after decade, without reproducing themselves, and too often they don't reproduce themselves because they simply don't have the vision and objective of doing so.

“The Southern Baptists have said that only 4 percent of the churches in America will plant a daughter church. That means that 96 percent of the conventional churches in America will never give birth. ... We need a new form of church that can be fruitful and multiply” (*Organic Church*, Kindle location 1249).

Those statistics sound right in our own experience, and in a sense we do need a new form of church that can be fruitful and multiply, but it is not a “house church” so to speak; it is a New Testament church that is not complacent, a New Testament church with a burden to reproduce itself and to bear fruit for the glory of Christ (John 15).

It is typical that the older a church gets, the less fruitful it becomes as a body.

“Fuller Theological Seminary did a research study that found that if a church is 10 or more years old, it takes 85 people to lead 1 person to Christ. If the church is between 4 and 7 years old, it takes 7 people to lead 1 person to Christ. If a church is less than 3 years old, it takes only 3 people to lead 1 person to Christ” (Kreider and McClung, *Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 266).

Again, this is probably true in general, and it reminds us that planting new churches is an important and necessary means of reaching more people with the gospel.

Overseas, on the “mission field,” churches typically want to start new churches and are earnestly geared toward that objective, but in the States this is often not the case. But why should the fulfillment of the Great Commission be different in one part of the world than it is from other parts? I know that as a missionary to South Asia, it is our passion to plant churches that reproduce themselves. We are not content to plant one church and merely see it grow numerically. We have a passion to disciple the people so that each member is busy in the Lord’s Harvest according to his individual gifts

and to train preachers and missionaries who can plant new churches under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This should be the objective of every church in every place. There are never enough truly Bible-believing churches, and this is truer today than ever, and the house church movement can be a challenge to be purposeful about the matter of planting new churches.

“If you want to see churches planted, then you must set out to plant churches. The same axiom can be taken a step further to say, ‘If you want to see reproducing churches planted, then you must set out to plant reproducing churches’” (David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*).

A Challenge to Be Innovative in Evangelism

The house church movement can also be a challenge to be zealous and innovative in evangelism.

Many of the writings on the house church movement are about evangelism. In some spheres of the movement there is a real zeal to see people come to Christ and there is an innovativeness toward that end that is refreshing, even though not everything they do is biblically legitimate.

Bible-believing churches need to get out of the rut of doing evangelism the same way that it has “always been done” and focusing only on things such as door knocking and VBS. In such matters, I have found that fundamentalist churches are often as tradition bound as Episcopalians. We ought to try to find ways that bring the most fruit instead of being in a rut.

I know this is what I do as a fisherman. I am not content to go to the same place every week and use the same bait or lure and the same technique if I am not catching fish. The goal is not merely to fish; the goal is to *catch* fish! I will do

whatever is necessary, including changing fishing holes, changing lures, changing the technique of working the lure, and changing the depth of fishing. I will troll, cast, pop, jig, whatever is necessary short of dynamite!

We should do the same as fishers of men. I am not talking about bar hopping or becoming a bar maid to have an opportunity to rub shoulders with the unsaved, or wearing a bikini to a beach party or prancing around in an immodest ballet uniform, or loving the same raunchy music and R-rated movies as the unsaved so you can commune with them about the latest iTunes offerings or Hollywood garbage.

The emerging element of the house church movement (which is very large) is willing to do all of this and more, but when Paul said, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22), he wasn’t talking about doing things that the Word of God forbids, such as being conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2) or dressing immodestly (Prov. 7:10; 1 Tim. 2:9-10) or taking a chance of being deceived by liquor (Prov. 20:1) or having fellowship with the works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). Paul made this very clear in the previous verse. “To them that are without law, as without law, (BEING NOT WITHOUT LAW TO GOD, BUT UNDER THE LAW TO CHRIST,) that I might gain them that are without law” (1 Corinthians 9:21).

The believer is not under the Law of Moses (Galatians 5:25), but he has a new law, which is the law of Christ and the law of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18; 6:2). The Spirit seeks to conform the believer to the image of Christ according to the standards of the Christian faith as recorded in the New Testament canon.

Admittedly, it would be “easier” to make friends with the unsaved if it were legitimate to drink and party with them and enjoy the same types of worldly entertainment, and it is probably easier to get them to attend a “cool” church that uses rock & roll and doesn’t preach separation from the world, but we cannot disobey God’s Word in order to do “good.”

That being said, there are still lots of ways that Bible-believing churches can seek to reach the lost within the bounds of Scripture if we make this the priority that it needs to be and start thinking “outside the box” a bit. Churches need to urge each believer to prayerfully think of ways that he or she can make more contacts with unbelievers.

Friendship Evangelism

“Friendship evangelism” has a bad name among some fundamentalists, but the fact is that Jesus was a friend of sinners and Paul was always out among the people.

We are not talking about “lifestyle evangelism” in the sense of trying to win people by our lives without the gospel.

And we are not saying that evangelism can only be done by befriending people. Jesus commanded us to preach the gospel to every person (Mark 16:15) and there is no way that the believers are going to truly befriend every lost sinner. There is a definite place for mass tract distribution and systematically covering a community door to door and gospel radio broadcasts and whatever other methods we can find to get the gospel to the greatest number of people possible.

But the fact remains that friendships are important when it comes to evangelism. We are simply talking about getting to know people so that we can demonstrate Christian grace and neighborliness and communicate the gospel to them.

The way to make contacts is to get out among the unsaved and befriend them. This is where the house church movement often shines, and it should be a challenge to Bible believers.

Some people get saved “cold turkey” through door knocking and tract distribution (which are fine in themselves), but more tend to come to Christ through a relationship with a saved relative, neighbor, friend, or co-worker. So believers need to set out to build more relationships with the lost.

Consider the following statements by house church leaders:

“We spend so much time building nice barns with padded pews, air-conditioned halls, and state-of-the-art sound systems, yet we have neglected the fields. We are as foolish as the farmer who builds a barn and then stands in the doorway calling all the crops to come in and make themselves at home. It is time for the Church to get her hands dirty in the soil of lost people’s lives” (Neil Cole, *Organic Church*, Kindle location 613).

“The great commission is not a ‘take it or leave it’ option for Christians. Many of us live in self-made Christian ghettos, never developing meaningful relationships with unbelievers. We believe that friendship with people in the world will somehow contaminate us. We avoid relationships of any depth with people outside the church and often are so busy with Christian activities that we have no time for others. It gets to the stage where we don’t know how to relate with non-Christians other than inviting them to a meeting” (Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 1026).

By no means do we recommend Neil Cole or Felicity Dale or their writings, but they and their house church friends are right in this matter, at least as a general principle. Bible-

believing churches do need to get their hands dirty in the soil of lost people's lives, not in the sense of sinning with lost people or putting our own children in danger of being negatively influenced, but in the sense of building relationships with spiritual wisdom and in the sense of loving our neighbors as Christ taught us so that we can be light and salt in this needy world.

At the same time, we *should* be fearful of "contamination" because the Bible teaches us to have such a fear (1 Cor. 15:33). The emerging church often mocks the dangers that are inherent in hanging around with unbelievers, but the dangers are very real. The believer always needs to be in control of the situation to make sure that he is not lured into sin or weakened in his Christian life and witness.

I think of a Christian friend who was saved out of a rough Harley biker lifestyle and became a bold witness for Christ. When he was invited to go hunting with some of his old drinking buddies, he went, wanting to witness to them. It backfired, though, because like Peter, who lost his testimony while warming himself at the fire of Christ's enemies, my friend lost his testimony on that trip. He began cussing and drinking again!

The danger is even greater for young people. It is doubtless true that more believing young people have been corrupted by hanging around unbelievers than unbelievers have been won to Christ by that means.

Yet there are ways to get to know the unsaved evangelistically without being contaminated by their sin, and that is what we need to do.

There are countless ways to do this, and each church member should be challenged to pray about ways that he or she can make contact with and build wholesome relationships with a growing number of unsaved people in order to be more fruitful for Christ.

Some can visit people in jails; some, in nursing homes. Some can visit shut-ins. There are lots of lonely people who are homebound for health reasons, and there are believers who can befriend them and try to win them to Christ. Some are in a position to reach high school students; others, college students. Some can befriend mechanics; others, hunters, drunks, druggies, divorcees, single moms, retirees, bankers, lawyers, military personnel, truck drivers.....

The question that needs to be asked by every believer is “who can I make contact with and who can I befriend for the gospel’s sake?”

One lady has a gospel baking ministry.

“My wife, Sally, is the chocolate-chip-cookie-baker queen of all time and she gives the cookies she bakes to all the shopkeepers in our neighborhood--from the dry-cleaner to the gasoline station owner. She exercises her gift of encouragement through praying for people and giving gifts to them. ... Sally, in her quiet way, had made many more contacts--not through overt evangelism but through friendship” (*Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 864).

A Christian friend makes contacts through the gun permit classes he teaches in North Carolina. He gives the gospel to each class of gun toters and tries to make personal contacts for Christ’s sake.

Another friend reaches out to men who work on ships that dock in his city.

Another makes contact with foreigners who live in or visit his area and has them over for meals and games and Bible studies. He opens his house for this purpose, and the foreigners appreciate it because it isn't easy to make friends in a strange country and expatriates are often lonely.

Neighborhood Walks

One way to meet the unsaved is by walking around a neighborhood praying for the lost and looking for opportunities to meet them, learning about their lives and seeking occasion to be a blessing. This is a good way for husbands and wives to work together in evangelism. They meet people, seek to befriend them and be neighborly, tell them that they are praying for them, inquire about their needs and help them when occasion arises, invite them over for coffee or a meal, etc.

Consider the following testimony about a house church couple:

"A couple of evenings later, Elizabeth and Scott made their first prayer-walk in the mobile home park. ... Sometimes they prayed out loud for their neighbors; other times they prayed quietly to themselves. Sometimes the Lord stirred their hearts to pray for things they knew were going on in the various homes. ... Scott and Elizabeth were completing their circuit of the park when someone called out, 'Hi, Scott!' There, in a carpeted carport, sat a neighbor. Janet was relaxing in a chair with a bottle of beer in her hand. ... 'Sit down, sit down! Visit with me.' ... The Lord started to lead Scott and Elizabeth to others. Several times, at the Lord's leading, they knocked on a person's door and when the door opened would greet the one who answered with, 'Hello, I'm your neighbor!' Other times as they were walking around the mobile home park, Elizabeth and Scott saw people watering their yards and they would stop and talk with them. They greeted whomever they met at the mailbox. Whenever the opportunity arose, they invited neighbors over for dinner" (*An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 933).

We hasten to say that charismatic “prayer walks” are not something for Bible-believers to emulate in the sense of trying to “bind” territorial spirits and claim “kingdom authority” and such things.

Yet there is nothing wrong with praying for one’s neighbors and beseeching God to work in one’s neighborhood and trying to make evangelistic contacts with the unsaved.

Trying to Reach every Segment of Society

Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the gospel to every soul (Mark 16:15), and people tend to congregate together into various “groups” in a society. There are old people and young, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, drunkards and druggies and homeless, farmers, businessmen, housewives and career women, single young people, newly married, students, gang members, artists, philosophers, witches, homosexuals, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Atheists, New Agers, you name it.

Each church should try to figure out how to get the gospel to every individual in the community and beyond as far as possible by God’s enablement. Going house to house to meet people who answer the door is good and necessary, but that is only the beginning, because that alone doesn’t present the gospel to every person.

I read of a young man who was saved out of a druggie lifestyle and started a Bible study on Wednesday mornings at 3am in a supermarket parking lot. The reason is that while working late shifts as a security guard he met people who were interested in Christ but since they worked at night and slept in the day they couldn’t attend regular church services.

He didn't just invite these people to church and wait in vain for them to come; he took church to them!

That's a great idea. That's thinking outside of the box. That's being wise in evangelism.

Evangelistic Prayer List

Prayer is a necessary part of evangelism, and one great tool is an evangelistic prayer list. Each church member should be encouraged to keep such a list. It contains the names of lost people that I am praying for regularly and trying to reach for Christ. If I am not willing to pray for the person and try to reach him, I should not add him or her to the list.

The list naturally begins with relatives, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances.

But the idea is to add to the list as I make new contacts with unbelievers during my daily activities, through tract distribution, etc.

I need to be on the lookout for people who show an interest in the gospel so that I can pray for them and work with them. I need to try to get their phone numbers as well as their names.

What do I do with the list?

I pray for the people on my list every day or at least regularly and ask God to open their hearts and to grant me wisdom in reaching them.

I call the people from time to time to tell them I am praying and to ask if they have any special needs that I can pray for.

I invite the people to gospel meetings. It is not enough to pray for people's salvation. They must hear the gospel and come to understand it.

I personally visit those who are showing interest.

If I meet a person from out of town and add them to my list, I try to find a church in that area that will make contact with the individual. There is a directory of churches at the Way of Life web site that can be helpful in this regard.

The book *Ideas for Evangelism* contains many other suggestions on this subject. It is available as a free eBook from the Way of Life web site -- www.wayoflife.org.

A Challenge to Encourage Families in Evangelism

The house church movement can be a challenge to churches to encourage their families to be evangelistic by using the home to reach the unsaved.

One point that is frequently made in house church writings is that the unsaved are often more willing to attend a relaxed gathering in a home setting than to attend a church service.

"People who would never think to step inside a traditional church will accept an invitation for a meal in your home, a picnic at a park or coffee at a cafe" (Kreider and McClung, *Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 902).

This is true, and it is an important truth, but you don't need a "house church" to do evangelism in homes; you simply need families in churches that are willing to open their homes for evangelism.

Churches should encourage their families to do this by trying to meet their neighbors and to make contacts with the unsaved by other means and then invite them to the home to share the gospel with them.

The following testimony describes the things a family can accomplish when the husband and wife determine to dedicate their home both to holiness and to Christ's Great Commission. This testimony teaches us that you don't have to be emerging in philosophy and you don't have to be a "rock & roll Christian" to "think outside the box" a bit.

Before we married, my husband and I decided we would never have a TV in our home. We stuck by this until our oldest children neared their teen years. Then, in order that they not seek entertainment from worldly influences in our church, or outside of the home, we decided to buy a TV JUST to watch an occasional Christian video. We felt that by setting strict guidelines we could control the box. Boy, were we wrong!

First of all we found, besides watching only acceptable videos, we began watching the news. In the beginning we only watched really important news and didn't watch on a daily basis. Then came elections and we spent a few nights watching that. Soon we discovered an 'innocent' black and white 50's series and found ourselves devoting 'just' a half hour a night with that. The weather was added to our acceptable list of what could be watched and occasionally another thing or two would creep in. Still, we felt totally in control and no red flags were waving before us regarding our TV watching habits.

Then one night when all but my husband were in bed, he wanted to check to see what the weather would be the next day, as we had a family picnic planned at a nearby lake. Half an hour later my husband came into the bedroom, dropped to his knees beside the bed and began to weep. I was alarmed, but didn't want to disturb him as he silently wept and prayed. After a long time he climbed into bed, embraced me, and began to sob uncontrollably. He explained that he'd turned on the TV and while flipping to check the weather had come across something totally unacceptable but that grabbed his attention. He then confessed that he had allowed himself to be drawn into lust and asked my forgiveness. He was so distraught over whatever he'd watched that for two or three days he could hardly eat and spent a lot of time in prayer. Meanwhile, our TV stayed off.

Shortly after this, while I was out shopping with our three younger children, my husband came home early from work unexpectedly to find our oldest watching (against the rules) a very worldly program obviously aimed at drawing the hearts and minds of teens into sin. Again my husband wept and that evening we had a major family conference. My husband took us through many Bible passages, both those which would warn against evil and about keeping our hearts, separation, holy living, etc., AND those regarding our duties to preach the gospel to every creature. He asked our forgiveness for allowing a TV into our home and gave pretty graphic details as to why he felt he had done wrong. Our children were somber and we couldn't tell what was going on in their minds.

The next evening, after supper my husband sat us all down and again confessed his wrong doing in regards to the TV. Again he spoke of our duty to tell our fellow man about the Lord. He brought an excellent lesson to us all about hell and then outlined in great detail different ways we could begin to reach out to others to share the gospel to them. Then he threw it open to debate, asking the children what we should do. Do we keep the TV and continue to drift further and further from the Lord and from carrying out the Great Commission, or do we throw out the TV and earnestly seek to bring others to Christ? I knew my husband had fasted the last two days and that he had experienced a tremendous revival in his heart, but I was wondering how our children would respond. The response was far more wonderful than I can describe. Our second daughter began to weep and explained that she'd been praying we would get rid of the TV as she knew it was causing stumbling in her life and she wasn't as close to the Lord as she had been before. Our oldest son said basically the same. In fact, all of our children without exception displayed a desire to get rid of the TV and to come closer as a family to the Lord.

The next day we all took the TV to the dump. It had only been in our home six months, but we had all noticed the difference it had made.

That night we began memorizing Scriptures together as a family. We have continued this practice nearly every night since and can recite all of 1 Peter, 1 John, and major portions of Romans and the Gospel of John. But that's only one tiny fruit of our 'sacrifice' of the TV.

We invested in a nice Bar-B-Q grill, and began praying for our lost relatives and neighbors. The next thing we did was to quit Thursday night visitation. This was done after much prayer and talking to our pastor. We simply did not find it effective and wanted to bring forth fruit that would remain, rather than simply knock doors because it is 'the way it is done.' We began to

invite neighbors over for dinner, sometimes on Thursday nights but also on Fridays or Saturdays as this seemed to fit into their schedules better. True, many neighbors were busy, but we found that if we kept at it we can get various ones to come over. After having them over for food and sometimes games, we would begin witnessing to them. Sometimes we watch a Creation Science DVD or a good Christian film with them. Other times we have a Bible study. We've gone on picnics, and with more interested ones, even on overnight campouts. Near Christmas, because we have a lot of snow in our area, we have a big snowman building contest. For this I cook huge pots of chili, make homemade cornbread, pies, apple cider, etc. We try to award nice gifts for the family that makes the best snowman within one half hour. Each year the competition has gotten stiffer and the snowmen more creative. This has been very popular and we often have ten or more families involved. We find that doing something like this in the winter causes even the immodest neighborhood girls to come fully covered, and in this way we can include a few families we would otherwise not be able to invite. After this we gather around a huge bonfire while my husband shares the real meaning of Christmas with these lost neighbors. We always take this time to invite the people to a special Christmas cantata at our church and many of them come.

I could go on and on about the creative ways my husband has come up with to share the gospel with our neighbors. But methods aren't the end in themselves and our family has a monthly day of fasting and prayer for those to whom we are presenting the gospel. We encourage our children to allow the Lord to lay some particular person on their hearts and to especially pray for that person's salvation. EVERY evening we pray for these outreaches. We have tried to keep two things before our children in this, the first being that we are to be SERVANTS and the next that we are to be SOUL WINNERS. Of course our Christian walk comes first, but these are the things we've emphasized beyond that.

There are so many different ways we have shared the gospel through the years since we banned the TV, and our children truly have grown up with a burden for others. They are soul winners! We live a fishbowl life and invite others into our family to see our walk with the Lord and to learn of Him for themselves. The result is that three neighbor families, two older ladies, and a teen have been saved since we cast out the TV! And we have others for whom we are praying and hope that soon they, too, will embrace the Saviour. From one of the first families we led to the Lord the oldest boy has gone to Bible College to prepare to serve the Lord as a missionary!

As for missions, we have challenged each of our children to adopt a missionary and to faithfully pray for that family or individual every day. Not only that but they are encouraged to work all year long and to send at least one offering a year to that missionary. One of our children cut grass all summer for three different families and was able to send over \$700 to his missionary at the end of the summer. This was all of his own accord but it set an example for the others and they are (in fun) trying to compete and to see who can raise the most for his/her missionary family this next year. We really emphasize prayer and even fasting for those missionaries and are often blessed to have them in our home on their furloughs. What a special time that is as we hear stories in more detail of those for whom we'd been praying.

Twice a year we participate in a special program at a local mission (for homeless) in town. This gives our children more exposure to what happens when people become entrapped in drugs, sin, slothfulness, etc. It also fills their hearts with love as they reach out to these people. We go to nursing homes often, but most of our outreach is within the confines of our home. As a result our girls have had to learn to cook delicious meals and desserts, because we often have neighbors or visitors to our church over for dinner. Our boys have learned to reach out of themselves and to value the knowledge of the Scriptures as they and my husband deal with the many questions brought up by the lost visiting in our homes. Our children are active in Sunday School teaching and all but one has had the joy of leading at least one child to Christ through this. Two of our boys have been asked to preach not only at our church but in others as well. (I attribute this, in part, to my husband encouraging them to memorize at least one of Spurgeon's sermons each year.) Three of our children play instruments and these talents are sometimes used in our outreaches. We've tried not to 'show off' our children to others, but to keep it in the context of glorifying the Lord.

I might add that both my husband and I fear that the Internet has even more potential for evil than the TV. Thus we've adopted a code of ethics for Internet use at our home. First of all, the Internet cannot be opened without a password. Our password consists of eight letters, four of which are known only to my husband and four only to me. Therefore, neither I nor my husband nor anyone else can open the Internet by himself. Our computer is in plain sight in the living room, so anyone using it can be held accountable at any time by others. We have found we seldom take time for Internet, though sometimes it has proven very useful. We call missionaries through Skype, as well as far off relatives and I have even won a cousin to the Lord by repeated conversations through Skype. We limit our

use of the Internet to 'necessary information' and have good filters installed to prevent accidentally viewing something evil.

We have decided as a family not to spend time at the TV and little at the Internet, but rather in Bible training, Bible memorizing, prayer and fasting, and gospel outreach. We could spend our evenings playing games but seldom do unless with a neighboring family or individual as an outreach.

However, I doubt any family can match the wonderful times we have together in the above activities, nor the love that exists between us. All of our children have a great desire to serve the Lord the rest of their lives, and we are confident we will see this happen if the Lord tarries (excerpted from *Keeping the Kids: How to Keep Our Children from Falling Prey to the World*).

The thing that impresses me about this family is their commitment both to separation FROM the world and separation UNTO Christ. We see the father taking an aggressive role in godly leadership, starting with purifying his own life and testimony. We see the mother acting as a godly help meet. Together they make an invincible team because they are in the center of God's will. These parents are wholly dedicated to the task of godly child training but they are not committed to isolation. They are dedicated to Christ's Great Commission and they are praying and THINKING! They are finding creative ways to use their family to reach the lost and are discipling their children at the same time. They are in proper affiliation with a New Testament church and are submissive to pastoral authority, but it is obvious, too, that they have a somewhat unusual pastor. They are not merely plowing the same old Independent Baptist rut a little deeper!

Not every family is geared toward and able to do what the previous family is doing. But each family can pray together about ways to be fruitful evangelistically. Each family can

try to befriend their neighbors to some extent for Christ's sake.

A Challenge to Develop Close Spiritual Relationships

The house church movement can be a challenge to churches to develop close spiritual relationships by finding ways for the people to spend more time together and to share their lives more intimately.

Some people join house churches in the pursuit of greater intimacy and “real” relationships, which is something that is missing in many churches. The larger a church is, the less possible it is for the people to really know one another and minister to one another. In a house church setting where the people can know every member and where they eat together regularly and spend more time together and share their thoughts and struggles and minister to one another, the relationships are more intimate and the potential for mutual ministry is deeper.

Some churches try to overcome this problem with “cells.” In a sense, the church is divided into smaller segments or cells which meet regularly in homes and can function more intimately for fellowship and teaching, but the “cells” remain an integral part of the larger church and operate under the direction and oversight of the pastors and are led by men who are appointed by the pastors.

Cell groups or home Bible studies can be good training grounds for teachers and potential leaders.

Cell groups and home Bible studies can also be fruitful evangelistically if the members are busy inviting friends and

neighbors and co-workers and other contacts to the group meetings. Many people will more readily attend an informal meeting in a home than a formal setting in a church building. And in the home environment, they are more at liberty to ask questions and spend time in discussion of spiritual things.

In our church planting ministry, we don't have cells as such, but we have evangelistic Bible studies in the homes of various members and we have seen a lot of fruit from these.

A Challenge to Every Member Ministry

The house church movement can be a challenge to churches to do everything it can to get every member involved in ministry.

This is a scriptural goal. Ephesians 4 says the leaders are to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry. Each believer is a member of the church body (1 Cor. 12:27) and needs to be equipped and challenged to find his place in ministry. Romans 12:6-8 mentions many spiritual gifts, including shewing mercy and giving.

The following is an interesting thought about the importance of getting the believers busy in Christ's service, which is an essential part of discipleship:

"In the book *Dedication and Leadership*, Douglas Hyde describes how he used to train good, committed communists. When new converts to communism were found, the leaders wouldn't try to protect them but rather send them out on a street corner to pass out tracts and paraphernalia to support communism, despite the fact that they knew next to nothing. People would question them and even attack their new beliefs, but instead of weakening their resolve it forced them to learn faster and better what they needed to know. It also resulted in their being even more committed to the cause. It is amazing how persecution solidifies commitment in a follower. Mormons employ a similar strategy. Perhaps the best reason for sending

young people on a yearlong, door-knocking mission is less about making more Mormons than it is about making better ones. Facing the onslaught of questions, challenges, and debates, these young Mormons solidify their commitment--on the frontline with bullets flying overhead. The internal commitment made in this highly impressionable year sticks with them for the rest of their lives" (*Organic Church*, Kindle location 1645).

It is important to get the Lord's people busy in trying to impart their faith to others.

A Challenge to Parents to Disciple Their Own Children

The house church movement can also be a challenge to churches to prepare fathers and mothers to disciple their own children.

As we have seen, a major emphasis of the house church movement is to encourage families to be strong and to take their child-discipling obligations seriously. This should be a godly challenge to any church. While the church is not merely a "family of families," the family is the first institution established by God at the dawn of human history and it remains a very important and essential part of church and society. Every Bible-believing church should encourage the development of godly, fruitful families that are training grounds for future disciples of Christ.

We deal with the many facets of this in the book *Keeping the Kids: How to Keep Children from Falling Prey to the World*, which is available in print and eBook formats from Way of Life Literature -- www.wayoflife.org

A Challenge to Welcoming Strangers

The house church movement can be a challenge to churches to welcome strangers.

House churches are small and informal and they often work at making strangers feel at home, and this should be a challenge to every Bible-believing church. We don't have to have "house churches" to find ways to make strangers feel welcome.

But the fact is that oftentimes this is not part of the "program." My wife and I have visited many churches where we did not feel very welcome. Oh, a couple people might shake your hand and smile at you and greet you and the pastor might say something to you, but that is not enough to make a stranger want to come back.

Even a "you are welcome here" time during the song service usually isn't very welcoming, in my experience. I have found that the large majority of church members ignore the visitors and just reach out to their friends -- and many don't even make the effort to move from their place in the pew! "I Shall Not Be Moved" is their favorite hymn. Even as a visiting preacher, I have often felt lonely and ignored during such times. Shouldn't those be times when the members specifically seek out every visitor and make an effort to let them know that they are loved and welcomed?

A real visitor greeting time during the song service is perhaps a tiny beginning, but there is much more to making a visitor feel welcome than even the warmest, friendliest "you are welcome here" hand-shaking time.

There needs to be a plan to greet visitors as they approach or enter the church building to welcome them and show them where to go and such things. Friendly, personable church members need to be assigned to this task and they need to learn how to do it effectively.

I recall visiting a church with my wife and children on Sunday morning. We didn't know where to go for the Sunday School. Everyone was scurrying around or talking to their friends but no one paid any attention to us. We had to walk down halls and ask around and literally find our own way to the classes. No one invited us over for Sunday lunch. No one visited us. This has happened on many occasions when we have visited churches. In fact, I would say it is typical.

Lancaster Baptist Church in Lancaster, California, has a good policy in this regard. Every visitor is invited out for lunch at the home of one of the pastoral staff members. And they do many other things along this line, because they have a plan to make every visitor feel truly welcome and to bring them into the warmth of the church family. This should be the objective of every congregation no matter how large.

“There's a Welcome Here” ought to be much more than a little chorus we sing as a tradition.

A Challenge to Providing Answers to Questions

The house church movement can also be a challenge to churches to provide answers to people's questions.

House churches typically provide a place where people are at liberty to ask any type of spiritual question. While we reject the house church's principle against authoritative preaching

and teaching, we are reminded of how important it is to give people the opportunity to ask questions.

I am so thankful that the man who led me to Christ wasn't a typical Independent Baptist with a pat little "Romans Road" gospel plan that doesn't allow for the answering of serious questions. I was actually taught at Bible College not to answer questions but to keep on track with the Romans Road presentation. We were taught to answer questions with this reply: "That's a good question and we will get back to it later." But we never got back to it and had no intention of getting back to it! Our objective wasn't to answer questions; it was to get through the pat presentation and lead people in a sinner's prayer, regardless of whether they really understood what we were talking about. This is one reason why I call this program "quick prayerism." It doesn't take the time necessary to deal properly with people's sincere questions and to make sure that they really understand the gospel.

We know, of course, that some questions aren't sincere but are "foolish and unlearned" (2 Tim. 2:23), and these are to be avoided. Some questions can indeed be a useless sidetrack. But sincere questions need to be answered and we need to be patient enough with people to resolve every doubt and confusion. To fail to do this is to be in danger of "picking unripe fruit."

It doesn't take a house church to do this. It takes believers who are compassionate and want the unsaved to come to a proper knowledge of the gospel. Salvation requires understanding. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to COME UNTO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Genuine salvation involves obeying from

the heart “that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Romans 6:17).

For more on this see the report “What Is Wrong with Most Soul Winning Courses” at the Way of Life web site.

The Agenda of the House Church Movement

At first look, it appears that the house church movement might merely be opposed to the facelessness of the seeker-sensitive, purpose-driven, multi-site, and megachurch movements, or to the spiritual lifelessness and boring traditionalism that characterizes the average church today, or to the abuse of pastoral authority.

But the house church movement has an agenda that extends far beyond this.

While we do not know the motives of the individual leaders of the house church movement, we do discern a three-fold agenda driven by a higher spiritual power.

An Agenda to Remove Christians from Pastoral Protection

First, among the “no pastor” or “weak pastor” house churches, the agenda is to remove professing Christians from the protection of God-called, biblically-qualified pastors and to launch them into the treacherous waters of end-time apostasy without a proper captain.

Consider the following statement:

“The Roman Catholic Church went on to canonize the system. Luther reformed the theology surrounding the gospel, but left the outer forms of ‘church’ remarkably untouched. The Free Churches freed the system from the state, the Baptists then baptized it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it in uniform, the Pentecostals anointed it, and the charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody has really changed the system. The time to do that has now arrived. ... Now God is touching the wineskins, initiating a third reformation, a reformation of structure. ... Today God seems to be in the

business of delivering His church from a Babylonian-like captivity of religious bureaucrats and controlling spirits and bringing it into the public domain. He is putting it into the hands of ordinary people” (Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book*).

We see that the house church movement, at least the aspect of it with which Wolfgang Simson is associated, is considered a revolutionary thing designed to replace every type of church currently existing. All existing types of churches are Babylonian. Every traditional form of church leadership is wrong. Every “traditional” pastor/elder is a harmful bureaucrat and a controlling spirit. “The people” must be in full control of everything. Every believer is a leader. The people must do the teaching; the people must make the decisions.

The attack upon pastoral authority within the house church movement is relentless and comes in many forms, from Frank Viola’s total rejection of the pastoral office itself to the more subtle redefinition of the pastor’s role by Wolfgang Simson and others. Viola’s organic church has no place for a pastor, whereas other house churches allow a minor role for a “pastor” denuded of real leading authority and placed under the direction of “prophets” and “apostles.”

Consider the following statements:

“There is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that supports the existence of the modern-day pastor” (Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*).

“... the New Testament knows nothing of an elder-ruled, elder-governed, or elder-directed church. And it knows even less about a pastor-led church. The first-century church was in the hands of the brotherhood and the sisterhood. Plain and simple” (Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*, p. 187).

“Nowhere in the New Testament do we find references to a pastor leading a congregation” (Barney Coombs, *Apostles Today*).

“The goal of leadership in a house-church planting movement is not to be up-front leaders or elders but to be spiritual fathers or mothers to a movement of elders and church planters” (Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung, *Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 696).

“We advise house-church facilitators not to call themselves pastors. We don’t want the paradigm of top-down, hierarchical, Old Testament-style leadership” (Kreider and McClung, *Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 921).

“The house church does not need a pastor in the traditional sense at all” (Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book*, p. 12).

“House churches do not have leaders in the technical sense; they have elders. ... These elders are empowered and counseled by apostolic people who usually function beyond the borders of an individual house church” (Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book*, p. 45).

“And whatever gave us the idea that it was only the pastors who had responsibility over the sheep? God gave all four offices to bring the sheep into maturity, not just the office of pastor/teacher. The apostle, the prophet, and the evangelist have the same responsibility as the pastor/teacher in bringing God’s people up to maturity” (Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House*)

“From sharing a burden to speaking a word of knowledge or wisdom--all would be free to take part. No one led the proceedings from the front. ... any leadership such as existed is a very low-key affair indeed, and far more of a back seat thing rather than anything up front or high profile” (*House Church*, edited by Steve Atkerson, pp. 249, 250).

“There is neither moderator nor emcee. Unless there is a problem to resolve, a visitor would not even know who the leaders were” (*House Church*, edited by Steve Atkerson, p. 49).

House Church gurus go to great lengths in their attempt to support the previous statements from Scripture, but in the process they twist things out of context, abuse “the original Greek,” and ignore the plain meaning of God’s Word in the most frightful, heretical manner.

The fact is that the terms “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” are used interchangeably in Scripture and refer to the same office in the New Testament church (1 Timothy 3:1). The terms emphasize three different aspects of the church leader’s ministry. As pastor, he is a shepherd; as elder, he is spiritually mature; as bishop, he is an overseer. The pastor/elder is not merely a mature church member. He must meet certain specific qualifications (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and must be ordained (Titus 1:5). The apostle Paul set the pattern for this with the ordination of elders in the churches he started on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:21-23). And there is no hint that the elders were ordained as some sort of temporary function.

While elders are warned not to abuse their authority (e.g., 1 Peter 5:1-3; 3 John 9-11), they do have authority and will be held accountable to God for exercising it in a godly manner. The believers are to obey those that have the rule over them (Heb. 13:17), and that verse means exactly what the King James Bible says it means. The Greek word for “rule” (hegeomai) is elsewhere translated “chief” (Acts 14:12), “governor” (Acts 7:10), and “esteem” (1 Thess. 5:13).

There are certain men in the churches with ruling authority, and the saints are to submit to them as long as they are leading according to God’s Word. Their authority is not their own opinion; their authority is God’s Word (Heb. 13:7). God’s people are instructed to honor them that are “over you in the Lord” (1 Thes. 5:12-13). Obviously not every member has the same authority. Elders who “rule well” are to be given double honor (1 Timothy 5:17). Obviously, then, elders are rulers.

These passages are unambiguous, totally refuting the “organic church” premise, and no amount of wolfish Scripture twisting will change this fact.

At the same time, self-willed men who exalt themselves and rule according to their own thinking rather than God’s Word and who are proud, demanding loyalty to themselves rather than to Christ and refusing to allow the people to prove all things by God’s Word, are not scriptural pastors and are not qualified to lead God’s people. (See “The Pastor’s Authority and the Church Member’s Responsibility” in the Articles Database at the Way of Life web site -- www.wayoflife.org)

The bottom line is that the office of pastor/elder is a biblical one and an essential one in the New Testament church and God’s people should show great honor to those who are doing the work of God in a humble, godly, scriptural manner.

As for how many pastor/elders a church must have, the Bible nowhere says. It should therefore have as many as it needs and as many as the Lord calls. And as for how pastor/elders share authority when they are in the plural, that too is not spelled out in Scripture and is something that each church determines before the Lord and in light of its particular situation. Frank Viola claims that “a senior pastor” is unscriptural, but he cannot prove that. It is something the Bible is silent on, and the Bible’s silence is not a law. In fact, a multi-headed body is a strange thing and in strictly practical terms it is more natural and reasonable that one man will have more authority than others.

The attack upon pastoral authority in the house church movement is further evident in its rejection of authoritative preaching and in its mocking of “theological watchdogs” and “policemen of the faith” (Simson, *The House Church Book*).

Without God-called shepherds who have authority to oversee the churches, to preach as “the oracles of God,” and to be theological watchdogs, the saints are left to roam the jungles of end-time apostasy without proper protection.

This is the effect, whether intended or not, of a large segment of the house church movement.

An Agenda to Create the One-world Church

Second, the satanic agenda of the house church movement is to create the one-world church.

The theme of ecumenical unity runs throughout house church literature. They condemn the “spirit of disunity” and “independence” and “separatism.” The charismatic house church leaders, which appear to be in the vast majority, see ecumenical unity as a sign of end-time revival and they try to network the churches under the “authority” of apostles and prophets.

Consider the following statements:

“Church unity among community churches, mega-churches and house-church networks makes room for the Church in your region to emerge. What does this Church look like? We believe it will be comprised of all types of churches--community churches, mega-churches, house churches, Baptists, Methodists and Charismatics--all working together in a particular geographical area. These churches, of many different types and denominations, represent the Church (the Body of Christ) as they honor one another, pray for each other and speak well of each other in a city or region” (Kreider and McClung, *Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 1697).

“We believe it is on God’s heart for this type of unity to happen in every city and region of our nation. ... we believe there will be an emergence of spiritual leaders from various backgrounds and denominations who will form teams of spiritual leadership to promote and serve the Church in various towns, cities and rural areas of our country. ... What we are describing is already

happening on a national scale through networks of churches led by Bill Hybels and the Willow Creek Association, Rick Warren and the PEACE initiative and the Acts 29 network out of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. Men and women of different denominations are networking together in ways we would not have thought possible in the past to provide resources for one another and help each other plant more churches" (*Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 1716).

"This kind of unity is beginning among the churches in our region of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. During the past few years, a local regional Christian leadership group has emerged and is in place to empower the Church in its many expressions ... Hundreds of leaders in our county are committed to working together as a leadership community, regardless of their affiliation. ... This regional group is not an organization to join, but an organized network of leaders devoted to relationships. ... they have appointed 20 leaders to work together on a council to serve the Christian leadership community ... All are members of the Body of Christ in our region. This regional team is committed to cooperatively establishing the kingdom of God in the home, neighborhood, community and marketplace ... the Lord has brought down walls that for generations had been erected between churches and denominations" (*Starting a House Church*, Kindle location 1722).

"The current movement spans the whole spectrum of orthodox Christian theology--the distinctions are increasingly becoming blurred. ... Theology doesn't seem to divide us any longer" (Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 3391).

"The great need today is for unity in the Body of Christ. ... We are one body. We are born into unity and we are to maintain that unity by receiving all the saints without regard to where they live or what group they attend. We all belong to each other" (Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House*).

"Each house church, properly speaking, is a part of the much bigger city church in whatever town it is located. ... all the congregations in a given area constitute the one body of Christ. We are to cultivate an attitude of oneness, ACCEPTANCE, love, concern, and COOPERATION with all the other believers in our city" (*House Church*, edited by Steve Atkerson, p. 135).

This ecumenical agenda is helping to build the one-world harlot church prophesied in Scripture.

An Agenda to Build the Kingdom of God

Third, the satanic agenda of the house church movement is to build the kingdom of God.

A large percentage of the house church movement is committed to the heresy of dominionism and kingdom building. The objective is not merely to preach the gospel and win people to Christ and disciple them; the objective is to change the world.

The kingdom building comes in two different forms: a-millennial Calvinist kingdom building and charismatic latter rain kingdom building.

Vision Forum is an example of the a-millennial Calvinist kingdom building. Vision Forum seeks to impart a “family vision for cultural reformation.” One of their DVD presentations is entitled “Training Dominion-Oriented Daughters.”

A larger number of house churches are associated with charismatic latter rain kingdom building, as described in the following quotes:

“It is not enough to fill our churches; we must transform our world” (Neil Cole, *Organic Church*, Kindle location 147).

“We are called to network together in a practical way to build the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in our communities” (Larry Kreider, *House to House*, p. 87).

“In order for us to effectively experience the Kingdom of God in every area of society and true transformation in our cities and regions, we must disciple both the present and the next generation to focus on their God-given call to ‘seven mountains of influence’ that shape society. These seven mountains include the family, the church, business, government, education, the arts, and media. New unconventional churches will spring up in the future with a clear focus on each of these

areas of influence, and we need to be ready to embrace God's people as they start these new churches, new wineskins ... Many of these new churches will be micro-churches that will focus on one or more of these mountains of influence that will bring societal transformation" (Larry Kreider, *House to House*, p. 259).

"God wants the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 2392).

According to this doctrine, there will be a "latter rain" miracle revival at the end of the age which will purify "the church" and establish the kingdom of God in many levels of society prior to the return of Christ. The revival will be led by anointed prophets and apostles who will perform miracles.

For more on this see the next chapter, "The Heretical Jungle of the House Church Movement."

The Heretical Jungle of the House Church Movement

The house church movement represents a jungle of heresies which are spread far and wide by the “networking” and by the ecumenical, anti-separatism philosophy that refuses to build walls of protection against error.

The effect of the house church movement, at least a large percentage of it, is to stir up dissatisfaction with “traditional” New Testament churches and to lead people into the treacherous waters of apostasy, and the waters of the house church movement is treacherous indeed.

Again, we would remind our readers that not all “house churches” are guilty of these heresies. There are biblical churches that meet in houses that are not moving with the flow of end-time apostasy. But those are in the extreme minority.

In just one of his books -- *Jesus Manifesto* -- Frank Viola introduces his readers to a virtual who's who of ancient and end-time heretics: Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, Origen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Henry Newman, Søren Kierkegaard, G.K. Chesterton, Thomas à Kempis, E. Stanley Jones, Roger Schutz (founder of Taizé), the “Cappadocian Fathers,” Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Reinhold Niebuhr, to mention a few. All of these are quoted favorably without a hint of warning about their rank heresies.

Neil Cole, in *Organic Church*, favorably quotes heretics such as Lesslie Newbigin, Søren Kierkegaard, Mahatma Gandhi, and Bono.

Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung, in *Starting A House Church*, cite David Yonggi Cho (the “Fourth Dimension Prayer” heretic), C. Peter Wagner (one of the fathers of the “apostolic” movement), Mother Teresa, Larry Crabb, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rick Joyner.

Wolfgang Simson, in *The House Church Book*, cites Elton Trueblood, Larry Crabb, and David Yonggi Cho.

Felicity Dale, in *An Army of Ordinary People*, cites David Yonggi Cho, C.S. Lewis, Frank Viola, and John Arnott, among others.

Robert Fitts, in *The Church in the House*, recommends Neo-orthodox heretic Emil Brunner. (Fitts’ book is endorsed by Loren Cunningham of YWAM.)

Consider some of the heresies that we find in the ministries and writings of the most influential house church leaders.

We are not saying that everyone who participates in the house church movement is guilty of rank heresy, but we are warning about the widespread existence of such heresies for those who have an ear to hear and for those who want to protect themselves, their families, and their fellow brethren from these dangers.

“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9).

“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Heresy Pertaining to the Nature of Scripture

It is no accident that house church guru Frank Viola frequently quotes Neo-orthodox theologians such as Karl

Barth (who Viola calls “one of the greatest theologians of this century”), Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The reason is that Viola himself holds the heretical Neo-orthodox view of Scripture. Consider some statements from his writings:

“Chapters 1 and 2 [of Genesis] were never intended to be the battleground for the Creation-versus-evolution debate” (Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 9).

“[The Bible] does not offer a plan or a blueprint for living” (Viola and Sweet, *The Jesus Manifesto*, p. 137).

“The Christian religion teaches that the Bible answers virtually every question that’s brought to the sacred text. The problem with this line of thought is that the true God cannot fit into anyone’s box” (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 130).

“Truth is not a book ... or a creed ... Truth is a person. And Jesus is His name. Christianity, therefore, is not fundamentally about following a book” (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 137).

“[The Bible] speaks anew to every age. It should be read in the light of new information and fresh discoveries. It must also be understood in community, not as an individual. ... Each age draws new insights from the Scriptures based on what that age brings to it. This means that revelation is always veiled in mystery. We bring to it our culture, our history, our gaze, and our glasses. The fundamentalist idea that the text has only one meaning is of relatively recent invention” (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, pp. 139, 140).

“... the New Testament doesn’t supply us with a detailed blueprint for church practice. It’s a gross mistake, therefore, to try to tease out of the apostolic letters an inflexible code of church order that’s as unalterable as the law of the Medes and Persians. Such a written code belongs to the other side of the cross” (Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*, p. 244).

“The meaning of Christianity does not come from allegiance to complex theological doctrines, but a passionate love for a way of living in the world that revolves around following Jesus...” (“A Magna Carta for Restoring the Supremacy of Jesus Christ a.k.a. A Jesus Manifesto for the 21st Century Church” by Sweet and Viola).

Robert Fitts also holds a Neo-orthodox view of Scripture:

“There is only one central truth around which we can all declare our unity and that truth is not a teaching or a concept or a principle or a doctrine. It is not a church or denomination or a movement. That Truth is a person. Jesus is the Truth” (Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House*).

Neo-orthodoxy claims that the Bible itself is not infallible, that only Jesus is infallible. The Bible becomes the Word of God only as we experience it as the Word of God. This denies what the Bible says about itself, that it is propositionally the infallible Word of God (e.g., 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

Neo-orthodoxy says that the truth is Jesus RATHER THAN a teaching or doctrine, which ignores the essential fact that we know nothing certain about Christ apart from the Bible. The Bible is not Jesus and it is not God and we don’t worship it as an idol, Scripture is the living word of God and apart from the actual words of the Bible we are left with vain mysticism, and the ultimate authority ceases to be God’s revelation of Himself in Scripture and instead becomes my intuition of the word of God. Apart from the Bible’s doctrine about Christ, we are in perpetual danger of being deceived by a false Christ (2 Cor. 11:4), and this is even more true in these last days (Matthew 24:4-5, 24).

Frank Viola’s Neo-orthodox heresy is further evident in the following statement:

“The meaning of Christianity does not come from allegiance to complex theological doctrines, but a passionate love for a way of living in the world that revolves around following Jesus...” (“A Magna Carta for Restoring the Supremacy of Jesus Christ a.k.a. A Jesus Manifesto for the 21st Century Church” by Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet).

To set up following Jesus *over against* allegiance to Bible doctrine is a very dangerous heresy. Apart from sound Bible doctrine, how do we know that we are following the right Jesus in the right way of “living”? This statement by Viola and Sweet is an out-and-out commitment to blind mysticism and is a recipe for spiritual delusion at the hands of the one who transforms himself into an angel of light and who walketh about seeking whom he may devour (2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Pet. 5:8).

House church leader Steve Atkerson also holds a heretical view of Scripture. He exalts church tradition to the place of authority alongside of Scripture:

“The Bible is our final authority, but it is not our *ONLY* authority. The Holy Spirit has actively guided and worked in God’s people for the past 2,000 years. When the church of history has studied a matter and reached consensus on it, that becomes authoritative for us as well. ... The slogan ‘Back to the New Testament!’ represents only part of the truth. ‘Onwards with the Spirit!’ is the other half of this truth: together they make up the authority of the Reformers--which was always that of ‘Word and Spirit.’ It is the same Spirit who inspired the Bible who is alive in the church, creating the tradition and bringing afresh to every age the authority of the once-given Word” (*House Church*, edited by Steve Atkerson, p. 135).

“The original Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* included the belief that whereas the Bible is our final authority, it is not our only authority. The church as a whole is also an authority” (*House Church*, edited by Steve Atkerson, p. 136).

The doctrine of Scripture is a fundamental doctrine, and those who err in this cannot be trusted on any other point. Viola and Atkerson are very influential men within the house church movement. They are associated with House2House and other house church forums. Their books are widely recommended and quoted. The fact that they are accepted rather than branded as rank heretics is evidence of the

spiritual blindness that permeates at least much of the movement.

Again, we are not saying that everyone who participates in the house church movement is guilty of rank heresies, but we are warning about the widespread existence of such heresies for those who have an ear to hear.

Heresy Pertaining to the Gospel

Frank Viola talks a lot about the gospel but in the three books that I read, and in his blogs that I have read, he never defines the gospel in a scripturally-clear manner. In light of Paul's warnings about the danger of false gospels (2 Cor. 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9), this is a huge warning sign.

Viola says that it is not sufficient to preach a "gospel that is centered on saving man's spirit/soul" (*Reimagining Church*, p. 137). He calls this a "man-centered gospel" and urges people to discard it (p. 149), but that is exactly the gospel that the New Testament emphasizes.

Viola says that "... there is no 'gospel' that is not a 'social gospel'" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 108), but this is patently false. The gospel teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but that is the fruit of the gospel and not the gospel itself. Paul summarizes the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, and there is no "social gospel" in Paul's definition.

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

In his writings, Viola does not emphasize the issue of sin which is such an emphatic part of the true gospel. "Christ died FOR OUR SINS..."

It is no wonder that Viola speaks highly of emergents such as Brian McLaren and counts them as friends rather than reproving them as heretics. McLaren says, “I don’t think we’ve got the gospel right yet” (“The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2004, p. 40).

In the book *What Is the Emerging Church?* we document the great confusion and heresy that surrounds the subject of the very gospel itself within the emerging church, and the house church movement is rife with this confusion.

Heresy Pertaining to the Stand for Doctrinal Purity

We have already seen that the house church movement is ecumenical. One of the major platforms of ecumenism is a non-dogmatic view of doctrine. Consider the following statements:

“Though we have never discussed any of these issues, the two of us might disagree about many things--ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, economics, globalism, or politics. But in this book, we have sounded forth a united trumpet. We have sought to present the vision that has captured our hearts and that we wish to impart to the body of Christ” (Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 172).

Thus, Viola and Sweet count even “soteriology” or the doctrine of salvation as a non-essential. This is the result of the slippery slide of dividing doctrine into categories of “essential” and “non-essential.” The “non-essential” category gets larger as one’s ecumenical relationships increase.

The “vision” of Viola and Sweet does not include a clear, settled doctrine of soteriology, ecclesiology (the church), or eschatology (prophecy), because dogmatism in such things gets in the way of “unity.”

Viola says,

“... making doctrinal purity the basis for fellowship typically ends up splintering the body of Christ even further. ... it's fundamentally unbiblical and profoundly unchristian to go about scrutinizing our fellow brethren with a critical eye” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 126).

In fact, it is fundamentally biblical and profoundly Christian to obey God's command to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Paul fought against false doctrine in practically every epistle he wrote and he oftentimes warned about false teachers and compromisers by name. And Paul said to follow him (Phil. 3:17)!

Viola says,

“I have many friends who are pioneering in the emerging church. And I applaud much of what they are saying, especially in the area of upholding a ‘generous orthodoxy’ that emphasizes accepting all Christians whom God has received” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 265).

A Generous Orthodoxy is the title of one of emerging church leader Brian McLaren's books, and Viola is promoting the same unscriptural ecumenism. In fact, Viola includes *A Generous Orthodoxy* in his list of “Best 100 Christian Books Ever Written” at his blog. McLaren claims that we can't be sure if our doctrine is correct, so we should be *generous* rather than strict, but the Bible says we are to rightly divide the Word of God and then mark and avoid professing believers on the basis of doctrine (2 Tim. 2:15; Romans 16:17); thus, it is obvious that we can “get it right” when it comes to doctrine. The Lord Jesus promised that we can know the truth (John 7:17; 8:31-32). We are to be so strict in doctrine that we are to “allow no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3). We are to take a stand even for the “spots” of doctrine (1 Tim. 6:13-14).

Viola says we can learn a lot from heresies.

“We have learned a lot from different perspectives on Jesus: feminist theology, creation theology, process theology, liberation theology, narrative theology, postliberal theology, emergent theology” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 109).

Here Viola lists a breathtaking number of heretical end-time theologies and instead of condemning them, he says he and his house church crowd have learned a lot from them. And yet he is labeled “an evangelical”! Obviously the term means absolutely nothing today.

Viola says churches can’t require any doctrinal tests.

“If a group of Christians demands anything beyond a person’s acceptance of Christ before admitting that person into fellowship, then that group isn’t a church in the biblical sense of the word. It’s a sect” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 119).

“The historic Christian creeds are an expression of the need to answer Jesus’ ‘Who do you say that I am?’ But that ‘you say’ is contextual. Each new generation, in every culture, is given a ‘you say’” (*Jesus Manifesto*, Kindle location 215)

“... the church doesn’t need rules established, laws passed, or wolves shot” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 25).

The non-doctrinal “church” envisioned by Frank Viola is apostate. Scripture is given for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We are to preach doctrine (2 Timothy 4:2). We are to continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine (Acts 2:42). We are to allow no other doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3). We are to have one mind in the church (1 Cor. 1:10). We are to teach doctrine to faithful men who are to teach “the same” to others (2 Timothy 2:2). We are to mark and avoid them which teach contrary to apostolic doctrine (Romans 16:17). We are to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Further, it is typical for house churches not to have doctrinal statements, because they consider these to be divisive. In reply to a question about doctrinal statements at the House2House web site, the following answer is given by Maurice Smith of the Parousia Network:

"I recently received several e-mails asking about our 'doctrinal statement' in The Parousia Network. This made me stop and think some more about doctrine and house church. Dr. Haddon Robinson once told me that doctrinal statements tend to be 'conflict documents,' that is, they tend to get written as the result of a conflict and a need to distinguish what one group believes as opposed to the other group. I call them 'shibboleth' documents (see Judges 12:1-6), 'We all say shibboleth but they all say sibboleth.' People in search of doctrinal statements are often in search of a 'shibboleth.'"

This is a clever downplaying of the necessity of doctrinal purity. Though Smith goes on to say that sound theology is necessary for a good church foundation, he seriously undermines this with his reference to a *shibboleth*, which is to say that to divide over doctrinal issues is to argue about meaningless things.

You can't have it both ways. Either doctrine is important and we can judge on the basis of doctrine and divide over it, or such a thing is merely a distracting *shibboleth*. But in true emerging church fashion a large percentage of the house churches do want to have this both ways. When an individual or church professes to care about sound doctrine while being ecumenical at the same time, doctrinal integrity is always the loser.

Heresy Pertaining to the Return of Christ

The vast percentage of house church leaders reject the pre-tribulational Rapture.

Frank Viola, for example, hates dispensationalism and despises the doctrine of the imminent Rapture of New Testament saints.

“John Nelson Darby ... raised proof texting to an art form. In fact, it was Darby who gave fundamentalist and evangelical Christians a good deal of their presently accepted teachings” (Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity*).

“Pretribulational dispensationalism gave rise to the idea that Christians must act quickly to save as many souls as possible before the world ends” (*Pagan Christianity*).

“Imagine a church where the members don’t know one another’s views on the rapture. Imagine a church where the members don’t know one another’s theories on the millennium--and really don’t care to know them” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 131).

Viola never misses a chance to take a pot shot at a literal interpretation of prophecy with its imminent Rapture and the urgency to preach the gospel while there is opportunity, because this gets in the way of the creation of his “new paradigm,” which is kingdom building.

The rejection of the imminent Rapture of the Saints is a theme that runs widely within evangelicalism and the emerging church.

Tony Campolo hates dispensationalism and rejects the doctrine of Christ’s imminent return. He calls it “a weird little form of fundamentalism.” Speaking at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s annual meeting in June 2003, Campolo said: “That whole sense of the rapture, which may occur at any moment, is used as a device to oppose engagement with the principalities, the powers, the political and economic structures of our age” (“Opposition to women preachers evidence of demonic influence,” Baptist Press, June 27, 2003).

Brian McLaren mocks the “fundamentalist expectations” of a literal second coming of Christ with its attendant judgments on the world and assumes that the world will go on like it is for hundreds of thousands of years (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 305). He calls the literal, imminent return of Christ “pop-Evangelical eschatology” (*Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 267) and the “eschatology of abandonment” (interview with Planet Preterist, Jan. 30, 2005, www.planetpreterist.com/news-2774.html). McLaren says that the book of Revelation is not a “book about the distant future” but is “a way of talking about the challenges of the immediate present” (*The Secret Message of Jesus*, 2007, p. 176).

Mark Driscoll of Mars Hills Church in Seattle and the Acts 29 network mocks the idea of a Rapture for believers and a one-world government with an Anti-christ who makes people wear a mark to buy, sell or trade (*Confessions of a Reformissional*, pp. 49-50). He adds that this kind of end-time “mission” is not a message from Jesus but rather one “concocted from a cunning Serpent” (“Mark Driscoll Rejects McLaren but Embraces Contemplative,” Jan. 11, 2008, www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/index.php?p=931&more=1&c=1). Driscoll mocks the imminent Rapture. He claims that the Rapture doctrine is evidence of the sickness of American Christians and mocks those who have the goal of leaving “this trailer park of a planet before God’s tornado touches down on all the sinners” (*The Radical Reformission*, p. 78). He libelously calls dispensationalists “nutty, Christian, end-times-prophecy Kaczynskis” (p. 165). [Ted Kaczynski was the “Unabomber” terrorist who murdered three people and maimed 23 others in his 18-year-long campaign against modern technology.]

Dan Kimball describes how that he rejected dispensational theology and the doctrine of an imminent Rapture and moved to his current position that “the kingdom of God is here, now” (*Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, pp. 87-90, 102).

Ed Stetzer of the Southern Baptist Convention says it is wrong to worry about whether the Rapture is imminent. “When the disciples had an inordinate interest in the end times, much like we do today in North America among evangelicals, Jesus said, ‘Do not get focused on that’” (*Breaking the Missional Code*, p. 40). Stetzer is referring to Acts 1:6-8, but Jesus was not talking there about the timing of the Rapture but about the coming of the kingdom of God. The disciples were expecting the kingdom to be set up immediately, but Jesus told them to focus rather on preaching the gospel and leave the kingdom to Him. This passage corrects the emerging church doctrine that we are building the kingdom of God in the world today, but it does not support the idea that we shouldn’t be concerned about the imminent return of Christ.

The Rapture of the saints is plainly described in Paul’s writings and the early saints were living in expectation of it.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44).

“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven,

whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

James and Peter and John also taught that the Lord is at hand (James 5:9; 1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 1:3).

The rejection of the Bible's doctrine of the imminent Rapture is not a light matter.

The early Christians lived in expectation of Christ's return.

"For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

The doctrine of a pre-tribulational Rapture is a great motivator for purifying one's personal Christian life.

It encourages the believer in trials and persecutions (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18). It keeps the church's focus on the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:44-48; Acts 1:8). It teaches us that preaching the gospel, winning people to Christ, and establishing churches as the pillar and ground of the truth is the most urgent matter. D.L. Moody had it right when he said: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'" The imminent Rapture motivates us to be busy in the Lord's work (1 Cor. 15:58), to live obedient lives (1 Jn. 3:1-3; 1 Th. 5:4-7), and to separate from evil (Tit. 2:13-14).

To deny the imminent Rapture is a fundamental error and it is spreading rapidly.

Heresy Pertaining to Christian Liberty

Most of the influential house church leaders abuse “grace” and hold the Christian rock philosophy that replaces liberty with license. Note the following statements:

“I shall argue in this book, the New Testament contains no ... list of rules and regulations for Christians to follow” (Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*).

“Sadly, many of us today combat problems and erroneous teachings with laws, rules, religious duty--and the mother of all religious tools: guilt” (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 25).

“Christ nailed to His bloody cross every law, every rule, and every regulation that would condemn the beloved people of God” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 32).

Viola warns about “a church that is filled with leader-oholics, justice-oholics, commandment-oholics, and doctrine-oholics.” He says, “For Paul, his apostolate was not to advance a defining array of doctrines or a checklist of propositions. ... Christianity is a relationship with Jesus the Christ. When things go wrong, it’s not because we don’t understand certain doctrines or fail to follow particular commands” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 39).

“For far too many Christians, life is a rule book of ‘dos and don’ts’--especially the don’ts. Jesus didn’t die to give us a set of rules. ... If we give nonbelievers the impression that the Christian life is restrictive, that God is waiting to pounce on us if we color outside the lines, why would they want to join us?” (Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 1581).

“Christianity is not meant to be a rule book or a series of laws that we are punished for if we break them. ... We no longer have to color inside the lines. God is not sitting up in heaven with a big stick waiting to catch us in some sin” (*An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 3507).

“But if I don’t have a membership roll with some basic requirements, such as tithing, faithful attendance, godly living, witnessing, etc., how will I ever have faithful people?” Such a question exposes the error of a system that produces pure legalism” (Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House*).

“Christianity has been secured with the shackles of dogmatism” (Minna Canth, quoted by Neil Cole, *Organic Church*, Kindle location 126).

While salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, salvation is unto good works (Eph. 2:8-10), and the New Testament is literally filled with laws, rules, and duties. The epistle to the Ephesians itself contains, by my count, 88 specific laws and duties in chapters 4-6. The believer does not obey the New Covenant by his own strength or even in himself at all. We are to count the “old man” dead and we obey God through the power of the indwelling Christ, but that does not make the laws and duties of the New Testament any less real and binding. What Christ nailed to the cross was the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, with its eternal curses. It was a ministration of condemnation and death because it demanded perfect righteousness from sinners who cannot provide it (2 Cor. 3:7-9).

The Old Covenant has no power over the New Testament believer (Romans 7; Gal. 3:24-25), but Jesus commanded the churches to teach the disciples to observe all things that He has commanded, and this refers to the commandments in the canon of the New Covenant (Matthew 28:18-20). The New Testament is a law of grace and liberty, because the curse of the Old Covenant has been taken away, but it is a law nonetheless and every commandment in the New Testament epistles is binding--not binding in the sense that disobedience brings eternal damnation, but they are binding in the sense that we are obligated to seek to obey them. We are to strive to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). What a high standard of righteousness! Timothy was responsible to keep the New Covenant commandments “without spot” (1 Timothy 6:13-14). That refers to details, so-called “small things”!

The doctrine is also binding. Paul instructed in Revelation 2-3, when Christ addressed the seven churches, He condemned them for holding and countenancing false doctrine as well as for disobedience to particular commandments.

Heresy Pertaining to Authoritative Preaching

Authoritative preaching is widely rejected within the house church movement. Consider the following quotes:

"The Christian sermon was borrowed from the pagan pool of Greek culture" (Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*).

"The sermon often stalemates spiritual growth. Because it is a one-way affair, it encourages passivity" (*Pagan Christianity*).

"In the house church, the teaching doesn't need to be a sermon; it can be a very short talk, an illustration, or a story, and it is usually accompanied and punctuated by nods and grunts of approval, or healthy interruptions of questions and requests for more tea" (Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book*, p. 36).

"From sharing a burden to speaking a word of knowledge or wisdom--all would be free to take part. No one led the proceedings from the front. ... any leadership such as existed is a very low-key affair indeed, and far more of a back seat thing rather than anything up front or high profile" (*House Church*, edited by Steve Atkerson, pp. 249, 250).

"There were no rules to our discussion; everybody's opinion was valid and there was no such thing as a wrong answer" (Tony and Felicity Dale, *Getting Started*, p. 86).

"Normally this is not a lengthy 'sermon.' Because of the open church format, the Holy Spirit is teaching throughout the service using various ones who participate" (Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House*).

"I call it Discussion Bible Study (DBS). Using this type of Bible study you do not need a teacher or any Bible study material. All you need is a Bible and a few people who want to know what the Bible is all about. If one is present with a gift of teaching, let him/her participate as a learner and not a teacher. It is group

participation and not a lecture-type presentation" (*The Church in the House*).

Robert Fitts' *Discussion Bible Study* is actually an exercise in pooling ignorance!

These men are wrong. God has ordained authoritative preaching and teaching as a means of feeding, warning, and protecting the churches.

"A bishop then must be ... apt to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2).

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

"These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" (Titus 2:15).

"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

Speaking as the oracles of God refers to speaking with the very authority of God's Word itself (Romans 3:2).

The organic church wants to replace authoritative preaching with non-authoritative "sharing." A dogmatic "thus saith the Lord" is replaced with an anemic "it appears to me that this is the meaning, but what does the passage say to you?"

Along this same line, Viola and Barna claim that the pulpit itself is pagan, which is nonsense. The pulpit is simply a lectern for preaching and teaching. Viola and Barna complain that "the pulpit elevates the clergy to a position of prominence." Maybe that is true in the Catholic Church, but it is not true in a Bible-believing church. In a Bible-believing church the pulpit does not exalt a man; it exalts the Word of God that the man is preaching. The preacher is to "reprove,

rebuke, exhort” (2 Timothy 4:2). Preachers are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). Preachers are to “speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (Titus 2:15). The God-called preacher who is proclaiming the Bible faithfully is God’s mouthpiece, and it is wise to honor this position and activity in the house of God.

Heresy Pertaining to Sanctification

I am not sure how widely this heresy is held within the house church movement, but Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet preach a heretical view of sanctification that fits his mystical approach to Christian living.

“So why do we preach rules, regulations, and laws instead of Christ? And why such an emphasis on ‘works’? Good works are simply fruit falling off a tree” (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 58).

“A person who is living by the tree doesn’t sit back and say, ‘Let me try to do good and avoid evil.’ Instead, he allows the life of God to flow within and through him. He yields to the instincts, promptings, and energy of that God-life” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 129).

The New Testament doesn’t preach rules instead of Christ; it preaches “rules” to show us the mind of Christ. Viola’s heretical doctrine of sanctification puts the professing believer into the driver’s seat and turns the liberty of Christ into license, because he feels that he is at liberty to follow his spiritual inclinations. If a believer tries to “yield to the instincts, promptings, and energy of the God-life” apart from defining the Spirit’s mind strictly according to Scripture, he becomes a mystic who moves according to his own interpretation of God’s will and his “intuitions.” As we will see, this is exactly what Viola promotes.

Good works in the believer's life are indeed *the fruit* of abiding in Christ, but according to the New Testament's instruction about sanctification good works are also *the means* of abiding in Christ (John 15:8-10)!

Viola is preaching the heresy that there is *one* key to sanctification in Christian living. In his case it is the key of a mystical abiding in Christ that is not clearly defined by and bound by Scripture, whereas the New Testament presents a multiple approach to sanctification. There are many aspects to spiritual victory and neither Christ nor the writers of the New Testament epistles ever present it as any one thing. It is not only resting or not only abiding or whatever, it is abiding *and* resting *and* yielding *and* obeying *and* avoiding *and* pursuing, etc.

If there were any one "key" to sanctification, we can be sure that the apostles and prophets would have described it in precise and clear terms to the oft-struggling first century churches and they would have emphasized it in the Pastoral Epistles to the preachers who were in the midst of the battle. But we look in vain for such a "key." Consider Romans 6-8. Here Paul describes many things that are necessary for Christian growth and victory. We are to reckon ourselves dead with Christ and alive unto God (Rom. 6:11). We are to refuse to yield our bodies to unrighteousness (Rom. 6:13). We are to yield our bodies to righteousness (Rom. 6:13). We are to walk after the Spirit rather than the flesh (Rom. 8:4). We are to mortify the works of the flesh by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13).

Viola's doctrine of sanctification through merely "abiding" is part of his mystical approach to Christianity, which is not doctrinaire or tightly prescribed by Scripture. It consists of a

vaguely defined yielding “to the instincts, promptings, and energy of the God-life,” but when that is not strictly defined by the Bible it is pure mysticism. The professing believer actually becomes his own god even while professing to be submitted to Christ as Head. What end-time confusion!

Viola’s doctrine of sanctification is also a heretical denial of the continuing reality of the “sin nature” in the Christian life. He says the believer is to “yield to the instincts, promptings, and energy of that God-life.” This doctrine is true as far as it goes, but it fails to deal with the fact that there is an “old man” as well as a “new man” present in the Christian life, and the old man has its own instincts, promptings, and energy. Romans 6:16 instructs the believer to yield to obedience rather than to sin, which plainly implies that sin is still present and is giving its promptings and can be yielded to. In Ephesians 4:22-24 the believer is instructed to put off the old man and put on the new man, and this *process* is described as a necessary part of Christian growth. Obviously, the “old man” or old nature is present in the believer and issues its evil promptings. As a believer, Paul testified that in his flesh dwelt no good thing (Rom. 7:18). John said that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8).

In the born again Christian’s life, there are holy promptings and there are sinful promptings, and the sinful promptings are wrapped in deception. The Bible says the “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). This wickedness and deception that is a part of our fallen nature is still a reality in the believer’s life, because the old fallen heart is still present.

Thus, it is not true that the believer is free merely to yield to the instincts and promptings that come to him. Rather, he

must carefully test those promptings by God's Word to see if they are right or wrong and he must continually reject the evil promptings in all their subtle forms.

Christian sanctification is not merely a matter of resting in the new man; it is spiritual warfare with the old man (2 Cor. 10:5). It is not merely floating along on the current of the new man in Christ; it is paddling upstream against the current of the old.

For more about this see "Steve McVey's Corruption of Grace" and "John Piper's Christian Hedonism" at the Way of Life web site.

Heresy Pertaining to the Latter Rain Miracle Revival

As we have seen, a large number of house church leaders are associated with the most radical elements of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, including the latter rain apostolic revival movement.

They expect the return of Christ to be preceded by a miracle-driven revival that will surpass even that of the first century. Churches will be unified; prophets and apostles will operate in sign wonders; there will be a great ingathering of souls; the kingdom of God will be established through many segments of society.

Prominent house church proponents who hold at least some elements of this theology include Larry Kreider, Chuck Pierce, Rick Joyner, Wolfgang Simson, Frank Viola, and C. Peter Wagner. These men have a wide influence even among those who do not hold the latter rain miracle revival heresy.

Consider some statements describing the latter rain “revival”

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“The time has come again for a great new move of God to sweep the earth. Several years ago, the Lord asked me to help realign His Body to create a new order in preparation for this move to begin. He had revealed to me that we were entering a new war season, and in the midst of the season, there had to be a new alignment, a new method of gathering and ‘doing church.’ ... The Kingdom of God is moving forward! To accomplish this requires all the ascension gifts to be aligned: apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and pastors. A plan of dominion for ‘this age’ has been released” (Chuck Pierce, foreword to *House to House*, p. 14).

“Now is the time to prepare for the coming awakening” (Larry Kreider, *House to House*, 25).

“Rick Joyner, in his book *The Harvest*, believes that in the next revival in the Church, one of the greatest tools that the Lord will use for equipping His people will be ‘home groups’” (*House to House*, p. 254).

“This book is intended to inspire, encourage, and celebrate those Christians who will be God’s instruments for gathering the harvest in this latest leg of history. As many prophets tell us, it will be a generation of somebodies and nobodies, people without titles, who will lead God’s movement on earth to fulfill its calling ... this book is a battle cry for ordinary followers of Christ who will be made extraordinary in purpose and power to flood this earth with house churches. And through their humble, self-denying, and obedient lives, the presence, knowledge, and glory of Christ will spread as the waters that cover the sea” (Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book*, Kindle location 285).

“I believe the Lord is preparing this net for the final harvest. ... There is an increase of regional networks springing up spontaneously around the country. Women as well as men are envisioning and equipping people on this journey. ... God wants ‘the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ’” (Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 1905, 1934, 2392).

Many of the most radical of the charismatic preachers associate under the umbrella of House2House, which is led by Tony and Felicity Dale. Frank Viola has spoken at many of the House2House conferences, including the one in 2011.

His book *Reimagining Church* is effusively recommended by Tony Dale. Contributors to House2House magazine include John Arnott who led the wild, drunken “latter rain revival” at the Toronto Christian Fellowship Church in Ontario.

Another speaker at the 2011 House2House conference was Wolfgang Simson who is a promoter of extra-biblical revelation and the interpretation of dreams and a proponent of the heretical latter rain apostolic miracle revival with its dominionist objective.

In the 1990s, Frank Viola attended the laughing-drunken-slaying “revivals” in Toronto, Pensacola, Lakeland, and Melbourne, and in a 2006 article he said that he was glad that he went to the meetings and had nothing negative to say about them (“Slaughtering Sacred Cows: Part 3 The Felt-Presence of God,” Present Testimony Ministry newsletter, April 2006, www.procinwarn.com/frankviola_april-2006.htm).

Viola praises John Wimber’s “Third Wave” movement which integrated charismaticism with evangelicalism:

“The third-wave movement has contributed a number of helpful spiritual accents. Most significantly, it has fostered a genuine hunger for and openness to God’s moving. It has produced a sound blending of evangelical and charismatic theology. And it has created a vast collection of wonderfully anointed praise and worship music” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 260).

The Third Wave’s so-called “openness to God’s moving” is blind charismatic mysticism not properly controlled by Scripture. Its so-called “sound blending” was actually the corruption of whatever biblical theology and practice previously existed in evangelicalism. And its supposed “anointed worship music” is an illegitimate co-mingling of the holy Rock Christ and the unholy rock of the world.

These are incredibly dangerous spiritual waters, and the Bible asks “can two walk together except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3)? The answer is no, they cannot. Men do not walk together unless they agree on fundamental things.

It is evident that those who associate with the house church movement can easily come into contact with this heresy and with the heretical “apostles and prophets” that promote it.

For more about John Wimber, Rick Joyner, the Third Wave, and the Latter Rain see *The Directory of Contemporary Worship Musicians*, which is available as a free eBook at the Way of Life web site, under the entries on Lindell Cooley, Tim Hughes, Kevin Prosch, David Ruis, and John Wimber.

See also *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements*, which goes into the history of this movement in some depth and is available in print and eBook formats from Way of Life - www.wayoflife.org.

Heresy Pertaining to the Continuing Office of Apostle

The rise of the “new apostles and prophets,” which is a part of the new latter rain heresy, is also closely associated with the house church movement.

As we have seen, many of the house churches are networked together under the direction of “apostles.” Consider the following quotations from house church writings:

“The Church will work together internationally as the Lord sovereignly ordains international networks of apostolic leaders” (Larry Kreider, *House to House*, p. 262).

“We formed a leadership team we called Apostolic Council to give spiritual oversight to DOVE Christian Fellowship

International (DCFI), and I was asked to serve as its international director" (*House to House*, p. 41).

"Teams of prophets will relate to the apostolic overseers on a regular basis as they receive messages from the Lord. The apostolic gifts need the prophetic gifts to stay on track. ... The Church will work together internationally as the Lord sovereignly ordains international networks of apostolic leaders" (*House to House*, p. 261).

"The Kingdom of God is moving forward! To accomplish this requires all the ascension gifts to be aligned: apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and pastors. A plan of dominion for 'this age' has been released" (Chuck Pierce, foreword to *House to House* by Larry Kreider, p. 14).

"Our current understanding is that the Lord will call many apostolic-type overseers from the Church that He is building in this generation to serve His people" (*House to House*, p. 231).

"The local church is not led by a pastor, but fathered by an elder, a man of wisdom who is engaged with reality. The local house churches are then networked into a movement by the combination of elders and members of the so-called fivefold ministries (apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists, and teachers) circulating from house to house, like blood circulating in a human body. The apostolic and prophetic ministries play a special foundational role (Ephesians 2:20; 4:11-12). A pastor (shepherd) is an important member of the whole team, but he cannot fulfill more than part of the task of equipping the saints for the ministry. He has to be complemented synergistically by the other four ministries in order to function properly" (Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book*, Kindle location 161, the foreword is written by George Barna).

"God gave all four offices to bring the sheep into maturity, not just the office of pastor/teacher. The apostle, the prophet, and the evangelist have the same responsibility as the pastor/teacher in bringing God's people up to maturity" (Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House*).

"Church reproduction and equipping [is accomplished] through the ministry of itinerant church workers such as apostles, pastor-teachers, or evangelists" (Steve Atkerson, *House Church: Simple, Strategic, Scriptural*).

Obviously a large number of house churches hold the principle that apostles continue to operate and to wield authority over networks of churches.

The issue of continuing prophets and apostles is an issue of Pentecostal-Charismatic heresy.

There are no apostles today in the sense of men who wield authority over the churches as the Lord's apostles did in the first century. Those were men who were personally appointed by Jesus and had seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). They could perform miracle signs to authenticate their office (2 Cor. 12:12). Together with the prophets, those apostles laid the foundation of the church, completed the canon of Scripture, and when they died those offices ceased. The Bible tells us that there are only 12 apostles in this sense for ever (Rev. 21:14).

The Greek word "apostolos" is also used in a general sense to describe men who are messengers of the churches, and in this sense there are "apostles" today. They are also called "missionaries," but they do not hold the office of a sign-gifted apostle and cannot be called the "apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). They have no authority over the churches beyond the congregations that they actually plant.

The Pentecostal "apostles" are self-deceived impostors who are building the end-time harlot church.

Heresy Pertaining to the Kingdom of God

A misunderstanding of the kingdom of God is a foundational error that permeates the house church movement and is also a key characteristic of the emerging church.

As we have seen, it assumes at least two different forms: a-millennial Reformed Calvinistic kingdom building and Pentecostal latter rain kingdom building.

Vision Forum is an example of the a-millennial kingdom building program, also called Reconstructionism, Dominionism and Theonomy. Vision Forum seeks to impart a “family vision for cultural reformation.” One of their DVD presentations is entitled “Training Dominion-Oriented Daughters.” Vision Forum’s movie *God’s Next Army* presents the goal of training young people to enter the halls of government and become national leaders for kingdom reconstructionism.

Patrick Henry College is an institute of higher learning for home schoolers that is devoted to a theocratic agenda of “the transformation of American society” through preparing “Christian men and women who will lead our nation and shape our culture.” It was established by Michael P. Farris, who is also the head of the Home School Legal Defense Fund (HSLDA) and the founder of Joshua Generation Ministries. The latter is devoted to training young people 11 to 19 to “become a force in the civic and political arenas” to “banish pluralism from America,” a dominionist, kingdom-now agenda.

Gary Demar’s American Vision organization is another reconstructionist outfit that has influence among home schoolers and house churches. American Vision’s objective is to “restore America to its Biblical Foundation--from Genesis to Revelation.” The vision is of “an America that recognizes the sovereignty of God over all of life and where Christians are engaged in every facet of society.”

This fails to recognize that America was never built solidly upon the Bible. It was always built on a mixture of Biblical truth and humanistic philosophy. I am not discounting the wisdom that the founding fathers exercised and the

wonderful and unique heritage we enjoy as Americans, but while some of the founding fathers were Bible-believing Christians, many were not. In fact, some of the chief of America's founders were unbelieving rationalists who despised doctrines such supernatural Revelation and Substitutional Atonement. These included Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

There is no pattern in the New Testament for a "Christian nation." There is a pattern for the church and the home and for civil government, but not for a Christian nation. The kingdom of God will only work in this world at a level beyond the home and church when God Himself comes to sit on the throne. There is no kingdom without a king!

In his book *Ruler of the Nations*, Demar describes the dominionist philosophy as follows:

"All government requires a reference point. If God is to be pleased by men, the Bible must become the foundation of all their governments, including civil government. This means that Biblical law must be made the foundation of all righteous judgment in every government: personal (self-government), ecclesiastical, familial, and civil."

When we look to the book of Acts and the New Testament Epistles we look in vain for a dominionist agenda. The apostles and preachers in the early churches didn't have an objective of "bringing the Roman Empire back to God" or establishing the kingdom of God within the Roman Empire. Rather, they fulfilled the Commission given by Christ to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). They preached the gospel, disciplined the brethren, established churches, lived holy lives as light in a dark world, considered themselves pilgrims in a strange land and citizens of a heavenly country, and waited on the imminent return of Christ (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

The theme of latter rain Pentecostal kingdom building runs perhaps even more widely within the house church movement.

"It is not enough to fill our churches; we must transform our world" (Neil Cole, *Organic Church*, Kindle location 147).

"We are called to network together in a practical way to build the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in our communities" (Larry Kreider, *House to House*, p. 87).

"In order for us to effectively experience the Kingdom of God in every area of society and true transformation in our cities and regions, we must disciple both the present and the next generation to focus on their God-given call to 'seven mountains of influence' that shape society. These seven mountains include the family, the church, business, government, education, the arts, and media. New unconventional churches will spring up in the future with a clear focus on each of these areas of influence, and we need to be ready to embrace God's people as they start these new churches, new wineskins ... Many of these new churches will be micro-churches that will focus on one or more of these mountains of influence that will bring societal transformation" (Larry Kreider, *House to House*, p. 259).

"God wants 'the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ'" (Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary People*, Kindle location 2392).

"Our call is to be God's agents, to rescue not only the human race but the whole of creation" (Tony Campolo, "Why Care for Creation," *Tear Times*, Summer 1992).

"Since 2001, the body of Christ has been in the second Apostolic age. The apostolic/prophetic government of the church is now in place ... We began to build our base by locating and identifying with the intercessory prayer movements. This time however we feel that God wants to start governmentally, connecting with apostles of the region. God has already raised up for us a key apostle in one of the strategic nations of the Middle East, and other apostles are already coming on board. Once we have the apostles in place, we will then bring the intercessors and prophets into the inner circle and we will end up with the spiritual core we need to move ahead for retaking the dominion that is rightfully ours" (C. Peter Wagner, New Apostolic Reformation, *Global Link newsletter*, Global Harvest Ministries, Nov. 1, 2001).

By surveying the Old and New Testaments, we can see the error of this doctrine.

1. In the Old Testament the kingdom of God was God's rule over all creation (Psa. 103:19) and on earth it referred to His kingdom in Israel (1 Chron. 28:5; 2 Chron. 13:8).

That kingdom was destroyed because of Israel's disobedience, but Old Testament prophecies predicted that the kingdom will be re-established on earth by Christ, David's greater Son, and that He will reign in truth and righteousness (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44; 7:14).

2. Christ came to Israel and preached the kingdom.

The gospel of the kingdom is the gospel that Jesus preached when He presented Himself to Israel as the Messiah. Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2; 4:17). This was the announcement of the kingdom promised to David's Son (Isaiah 9:6-7). (The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are largely synonymous in the Gospels. One emphasizes the fact that it is God's kingdom, while the other emphasizes that it is a kingdom that will come from Heaven.)

Christ came to His own people, Israel, but they rejected Him (John 1:11; 19:15), and He warned them that the kingdom would be taken from them because of their rebellion and given to another nation (Mat. 21:42-26).

Christ preached a literal glorious kingdom that would be established on earth. Peter, James, and John were given a fore-view of it on the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk.

9:27-31). Christ taught His disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come to earth (Luke 11:2). He said Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be in the kingdom (Lk. 13:29). He corrected the view of those who thought the kingdom of God was going to be established at that time, saying that the kingdom would not be established until the "nobleman" goes into a far country and then returns" (Lk. 19:11-27). Christ said the kingdom would be established after the Great Tribulation (Lk. 21:31). He said He would drink the fruit of the vine with His disciples in the kingdom (Lk. 22:18). When the disciples were arguing about who would be great in the kingdom of God, Christ corrected their thinking about the nature of greatness but He confirmed that the kingdom of God is a literal kingdom that will be established at His return (Lk. 22:24-30). Jesus plainly stated that His kingdom is not of this world NOW (John 18:36).

Christ's kingdom will come when He comes in power and glory to establish it.

Jesus came unto His own people, Israel, and was rejected, and this had been prophesied in Scripture. He then turned His focus from Israel and said, "I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Mat. 16:18).

Christ stopped announcing the kingdom and turned His attention to dying on the cross for man's sin, and after He rose from the dead He sent His disciples forth to preach the gospel to every nation (Acts 1:8). In this present church age Christ is calling out a people for His name from among the Gentiles while Israel is largely blinded, but when this dispensation is finished He will turn His attention back to Israel and fulfill His covenants with them. Paul is very clear about this in Romans 11:25-27.

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”

3. The kingdom of God exists in a mystery form during this present church age (Mat. 13:10-11).

A “mystery” refers to truth that was hidden in the Old Testament times but revealed in the New (Rom. 16:25-26). The Old Testament prophets did not see the church age in between Christ’s two comings.

During the church age, the kingdom takes a new and strange mystery form not described in Old Testament prophecy. The king is in Heaven and the kingdom is not yet established on earth. Instead, the kingdom of God resides in the small, despised apostolic churches, while the devil’s false kingdom grows quickly and spreads throughout the world (Mat. 13:31-32).

4. Believers enter a spiritual kingdom of Christ when they are born again (Col. 1:13).

This is the kingdom comprised of all who submit to God’s authority.

5. The kingdom of God will come to earth in its prophetic fullness at the return of Christ.

See Acts 14:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Timothy 4:1; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 12:10.

Believers are not building the kingdom of God on earth today. They are snatching brands from the coming fire before

the day of salvation is ended (1 Cor. 9:19; 10:33; 2 Cor. 5:11, 18-21; 6:2; Jude 23). Today the “whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19), and the devil is its god (2 Cor. 4:4).

The apostles and prophets in the early churches (as described in the book of Acts and the Epistles) did not band together to accomplish grandiose social-justice projects; they did not pursue artsy activities; they did not try to save the earth; they did not try to transform Caesar’s empire. They preached the gospel and shined as lights in this dark world by their holy lives. Christ’s Great Commission emphasizes gospel preaching (Mat. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:46-48; Acts 1:8).

After Christ rose from the dead and as He was preparing them for His ascension, the disciples asked Him, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus’ reply is very instructive. He did not correct their understanding of the establishment of a literal kingdom of earth; rather, He told them that it was not time for that long-expected kingdom to be established and that our duty in this church age is to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.

“And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

After this, Christ ascended to Heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples to empower them for this great work. This commission of world evangelism will not be abrogated until church age saints are removed from this world and the Lord regenerates Israel and restores them to the front burner of His plan for the ages. At that time

anointed Jewish preachers will pick up the mantle (Revelation 7).

The rod of iron

The Bible says that in the kingdom of God the Law will be enforced with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15; Psalm 2:7-9). Christ's kingdom will not be a democracy but a divine dictatorship, a theocracy, and no one will be given a choice as to whether to obey Him or not. Christ's law will be established as international law and every individual will be required to obey it, and disobedience will be dealt with quickly and rigorously. Justice and righteousness will reign because injustice and unrighteousness will be punished and punished quickly.

If the house church movement is truly intent on building the kingdom of God today, they should be wielding this rod. The very fact that believers have no power or authority to wield this rod today is evidence that we are not establishing the kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom of God will be established by supernatural power, not by the feeble efforts of pre-resurrection saints in this present world in which the devil is god and believers are humble, suffering pilgrims (2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 11:13-16).

What about Luke 17:20-21?

"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

In interpreting this passage we must first note that there is a sense in which the kingdom of God WILL come with observation, as Jesus stated in verse 24 of this same passage.

“For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.”

Christ taught the same thing in Luke 19:11-27 and many other places, as we have seen in the previous study on the kingdom.

In what sense, then, is Christ saying that the kingdom of God “cometh NOT with observation” and “the kingdom of God is within you”?

It must be understood that these statements are addressed to the unregenerate Pharisees.

Jesus was saying that the kingdom of God would not come with observation in the sense of searching for it in various places. It would not come by searching. See Luke 17:21 and Matthew 24:26-27.

It would also not come with observation in the sense of demand. It would not come by demanding it in that present time. The Pharisees were demanding that Jesus show them the kingdom of God, and their demand would not be fulfilled. They had rejected Jesus as Christ, so the kingdom of God was not going to come in that day.

The kingdom of God was in them in the sense that it was already in their midst because Jesus the Christ and rightful King was present. The term “kingdom of God” is used repeatedly in this sense in the Gospels, as Christ was presenting Himself as the Messiah of Israel. “The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (Lk. 10:9). Note the following passages carefully: Luke 10:9, 11; 11:20; 13:28-29; 14:15; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16, 18; 23:51.

Jesus was not saying that the kingdom of God was in the midst of the Pharisees in the sense that it was inside of them in a spiritual sense, because they were not saved. He said elsewhere:

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

As we have seen, the Bible is clear in its teaching of the kingdom of God, and Jesus made it plain that He was referring to a kingdom that was promised to Him as the Son of David and that would be established at His return. To take Luke 17:20-21, which is a relatively obscure passage, and build one’s doctrine of the kingdom primarily upon it and then use it to overthrow the teaching of many plain Scriptures is upside down hermeneutics. This is the way that false teachers (mis)use the Bible.

Heresy Pertaining to Roman Catholic Contemplative Prayer

The heretical and spiritually-dangerous contemplative prayer mysticism, which is borrowed from the darkness of Roman Catholic monasticism, has swept through a wide swath of house churches.

Consider Frank Viola, for example. By his own admission, he has been deeply involved with contemplative mysticism since the mid-1990s.

“In 1994, what came to be known as ‘the Toronto Blessing’ hit the United States. Rodney Howard-Browne held his first convention in the Carpenter’s Home Church in Lakeland, Florida. That convention went on for weeks. From there, it quickly spread to other parts of North America: most notably Toronto, Canada; Melbourne, Florida; and Pensacola,

Florida. Upon hearing about the new move of God in 1994, I traveled to Lakeland and sat in on those first meetings where 'the blessing' had just begun. The following year, I traveled to Melbourne, Florida and sat in a meeting officiated by Randy Clark when the phenomenon had spread there in full force. I will not share my observations of 'the blessing' in this article. But I'm glad I went to those meetings. ...

"One of my closest friends is a man named Frank Valdez. I met Frank in 1992. He is the wisest Christian I've ever met. ... Sometime in 1995, as we were sharing lunch together, I told Frank about my observations on 'the Toronto blessing.' This led into an invaluable discussion that marked a turning point in my life. Frank said to me, 'There is a Christian tradition that practices a form of prayer that employs no words. It's beyond speaking in tongues and deeper than the Toronto blessing.' He had my attention. As I quizzed him about his comment, Frank began to share with me about the contemplative prayer tradition. He spoke about centering prayer, lectio divina, and other ancient spiritual practices that were unfamiliar to me at the time. ... Frank introduced me to the Christian 'mystics.' ... Meister Eckhart was a 13th century German mystic who is generally regarded as the fountainhead of 'Rhinelander mysticism.' He taught that God was beyond all conceptualization. This conceptualization included the 'concept' of god itself. Meister pointed people to the 'God beyond god, i.e., the God who exceeds any concept we have of Him. ... Thomas Merton was very influenced by Eckhart. Merton added a social and historical dimension to Eckhart's critique of religion" ("Slaughtering Sacred Cows: Part 3 The Felt-Presence of God," *Present Testimony Ministry* newsletter, April 2006, http://procinwarn.com/frankviola_april-2006.htm).

Nothing could provide a more enlightening and frightful glimpse into house church guru Frank Viola's doctrine and philosophy of Christian living than this testimony. He is a mystic who has sought enlightenment through the most radical of Pentecostal nonsense (e.g., the Lakeland Outpouring with its Holy Ghost Bartender, Rodney Howard-Browne, dispensing uncontrollable laughter and spiritual drunkenness; the Toronto Blessing with its barking and roaring and crowing; the Brownsville Revival in Pensacola with its pathetic uncontrollable shakings and its pastor so "drunk" in the "spirit" that he had to be hauled out of church in a wheelbarrow).

Viola doesn't tell us to what extent he agrees with these things, but the very fact that he would travel long distances to such places and his refusal to renounce them is evidence of his spiritual blindness and his commitment to a mysticism that is not bound by Scripture.

Yet Viola tells us that he has found an even more powerful form of mysticism in the contemplative movement, and he mentions two of the most radical and dangerous of the contemplative mystics: Meister Eckhart and Thomas Merton.

Eckhart was a German Dominican priest who taught complex gnostic and pagan doctrines. His theology was akin to Hinduism and Buddhism. He taught evolution and reincarnation. In his book *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, Zen master D.T. Suzuki compared Eckhart's teaching favorably with Zen Buddhism. Eckhart taught that God, which he called "the absolute principle" and "the ground of the soul," is "pure intellect and not being," and that man at his highest level is one with God. Eckhart said that in every man *there* is divinity and spiritual wisdom. He called this "divine ground," "divine spark," "divine image," "holy self," and "inner light."

Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic monk, was a universalist and a panentheist (God is in everything). He called himself a Buddhist and traveled to the coast of Sri Lanka to worship before Buddhist statues, claiming that this was the most powerful spiritual experience of his life. The titles of his books include *Zen and the Birds of the Appetite* and *Mystics and the Zen Masters*. He said:

"I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity. The future of Zen is in the West. I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can" (David Steindl-Rast, "Recollection of

Thomas Merton's Last Days in the West," *Monastic Studies*, 7:10, 1969).

Merton promoted a blind mystical communion with God that "is beyond words, beyond speech, beyond concept" (*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 1975 edition, p. 308).

Any "god" that is beyond words, speech, and concept is not the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture.

Merton was led by his contemplative mysticism to believe in the pagan heresies of universalism and the divinity of man. He said that if men were to realize who they really are, they would bow down and worship one another.

To illustrate how unscriptural and spiritually dangerous the contemplative practices are we will look at **CENTERING PRAYER**, which is one of the most popular.

Centering prayer is also called centering down. It involves quieting the mind and emptying it of conscious thoughts about God with the objective of entering into a non-verbal experiential communion with God in the center of one's being and thereby achieving direct revelation from God.

Thomas Merton, one of the modern fathers of centering prayer, claimed that "the simplest way to come into contact with the living God is to go to one's center and from there pass into God" (*Finding Grace at the Center*, p. 28).

Here is how he described it:

"Then we move in faith to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dwelling in creative love in the depths of our being. This is the whole essence of the prayer. ... All the rest of the method is simply a means to enable us to abide quietly in this center, and to allow our whole *being to share in this refreshing contact with its Source*" (*Finding Grace at the Center*, 2002, p. 32).

“... savor the silence, the Presence...” (p. 35).

“As soon as we move in love to God present in our depths, we are there ... we simply want to remain there and be what we are” (p. 39).

“We might think of it as if the Lord Himself, present in our depths, were quietly repeating His own name, evoking His presence and very gently summoning us to an attentive response. We are quite passive. We let it happen” (p. 39).

“... we want immediate contact with God Himself, and not some thought, image, or vision of him...” (p. 42).

“... open yourself interiorly to the mystery of God’s enveloping presence” (p. 48).

“... interior silence is the proximate goal of this prayer” (p. 52).

“... our theme is the center, that is, the place of meeting of the human spirit and the divine Spirit” (p. 80).

The practice is called “this union, this face-to-face encounter” (p. 15), “passive meditation” (p. 20), “a fourth state of consciousness” (p. 34), “savoring the silence” (p. 35), “this nothing” (p. 49), “the deep waters of silence” (p. 52), “deep tranquility” (p. 54).

Centering prayer is an attempt to enter into a non-thinking mode. Contemplative prayer guru Basil Pennington said:

“In a meditation like Centering Prayer, you leave the rational mind and emotions behind, open yourself to rest in the Divine. St. Thomas Aquinas says, ‘Where the mind leaves off, the heart goes beyond’” (interview with Mary NurrieStearns published on the Personal Transformation website, www.personaltransformation.com/Pennington.html).

This is blind mysticism.

In *The Signature of Jesus*, Brennan Manning, who has a broad influence within the house church movement, says centering prayer requires three steps, the first two of which are as follows:

The first step is to quiet down and “stop thinking about God” (p. 212).

The second step is to choose a “sacred word” and “without moving your lips, repeat the word inwardly, slowly, and often” (p. 218). The word might be “love” or “God” or something else. This is to be done until the mind is dwelling upon that one word without distraction and is carried by that practice into a non-thinking communion with God at the center of one’s being. This mantra is the key to entering the non-thinking mode.

Former New Ager Ray Yungen explains:

“When a word or phrase is repeated over and over, after just a few repetitions, those words lose their meaning and become just sounds. ... After three or four times, the word can begin to lose its meaning, and if this repeating of words were continued, normal thought processes could be blocked, making it possible to enter an altered state of consciousness because of hypnotic effect that begins to take place. It really makes no difference whether the words are ‘You are my God’ or ‘I am calm,’ the results are the same” (*A Time of Departing*, p. 150).

The mantra, or repetition of a word, produces a mindless hypnotic state. The actual meaning of the word quickly becomes lost to the mind, and that is the objective. The mantra allows the practitioner to put aside thinking in order to reach an altered state of consciousness called “the silent place” in which one allegedly experiences God directly.

Practitioners of eastern religions recognize the power of the mantra in entering this state. For example, Deepak Chopra, a popular Hindu New Ager, says:

“A mantra ... has little or no meaning to distract us. Therefore it is an easier vehicle for going inward than prayer or verbal contemplation” (*How to Know God*, p. 94).

Amazingly, Chopra, who believes in the divinity of man, recommends the ancient Catholic monastic manual *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which is very popular in the evangelical contemplative prayer movement. Chopra considers the centering prayer techniques contained in this manual to be the same as Hindu yoga.

“There is no doubt that people resist the whole notion of God being an inner phenomenon. ... Yet its importance is stated eloquently in the medieval document known as ‘The Cloud of Unknowing,’ written anonymously in the fourteenth century. ... The writer informs us that ANY THOUGHT IN THE MIND SEPARATES US FROM GOD, because thought sheds light on its object. ... Even though the cloud of unknowing baffles us, it is actually closer to God than even a thought about God and his marvelous creation. We are advised to go into a ‘cloud of forgetting’ about anything other than the silence of the inner world. For centuries this document has seemed utterly mystical, but it makes perfect sense once we realize that THE RESTFUL AWARENESS RESPONSE, WHICH CONTAINS NO THOUGHTS, is being advocated. ...

“We aren’t talking about the silence of an empty mind ... But the thought takes place against a background of nonthought. Our writer equates it with KNOWING SOMETHING THAT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE STUDIED. The mind is full of a kind of knowing that could speak to us about anything, yet it has no words; therefore we seek this knowingness in the background” (Chopra, *How to Know God*, 2000, pp. 94, 95, 98).

In this same book, Chopra says, “I believe that God has to be known by looking in the mirror” (p. 9). Thus Chopra is describing meditative methods whereby the individual can allegedly come into contact with his “higher self” or divinity, yet he is using “Christian” contemplative prayer mysticism to get there!

Chopra says that mantra-induced, mind-emptying centering prayer techniques result in non-verbal revelation.

This is a loud warning to those who have ears to hear. According to Scripture, who is the author of the revelation that Chopra and his fellow Hindu New Agers are receiving about their own divinity?

Richard Foster says repetitious prayers such as “breath prayers” “BIND THE MIND” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, p. 124).

Tricia Rhodes, in her book *The Soul at Rest*, which is “a step-by-step journey of learning contemplative prayer, suggests:

“Make every effort to stop the flow of talking going on within you--to slow it down until it comes to a halt” (*The Soul at Rest*, 1996, p. 28).

The result of centering prayer is supposed to be mystical knowledge obtained through communion with God in one’s being apart from Scripture.

“For in this darkness we experience an intuitive understanding of everything material and spiritual without giving special attention to anything in particular” (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 68).

“To know God in this way is to perceive a new dimension to all reality” (*Finding Grace at the Center*, p. 60).

“... we learn that our willingness to listen in silence opens up a quiet space in which we can hear His voice, a voice that longs to speak and offer us guidance for our next step” (Ruth Barton, “Beyond Words,” *Discipleship Journal*, Sept-Oct. 1999).

Contemplative prayer mysticism is sweeping through evangelicalism. It is promoted by Rick Warren, Gary Thomas, Bill Hybels, Chuck Swindoll, Dallas Willard, Ed Young, Sr., David Jeremiah, Beth Moore, Mark Driscoll, Max Lucado, Philip Yancy, Lee Strobel, Charles Stanley, Brennan Manning, and many others. Contemplative prayer

books are published by Zondervan, InterVarsity Press, the Navigators, and Moody Press. It is taught at Southern Baptist seminaries, Wheaton College, Biola, and many other places.

The mysticism that permeates many realms of the house church movement is also evident in the emphasis on listening to “the heart” as opposed to rationalistic thinking. Wolfgang Simson says:

“The core elements of Christianity - faith, love, hope, vision, passion - cannot be grasped by logic and rationalistic thinking, because they are so much more than that. Logic, analytic reasoning and plain Newtonian 1-2-3-cause-and-effect thinking is quite simply not capable to adequately conceive an omnipresent, all-powerful and loving God going to the cross for mankind” (Wolfgang Simson, “Belong, Believe, Behave,” DAWN website).

This is a rank heresy. Once you divorce your “heart” from rationalistic thinking, you have no absolute standard for judging error.

Man’s “heart” in Scripture is not different from his thinking. The Bible says man thinks in his heart (Gen. 6:5; 1 Chron. 29:18; Job 17:11; Prov. 23:7; Dan. 2:30; Mat. 15:19; Heb. 4:12).

If God can’t be known through logical thinking, then the Bible is an exercise in vanity, because it claims to be a revelation of God in terms of propositional, logical, rational doctrine. God is known in Christ, and it is by Scripture that we know the difference between the true Christ and false ones. We know the truth by continuing in Christ’s Word, not by trying to know truth mystically beyond logic and rationalistic thinking (John 8:31-32).

Felicity Dale enunciated the same heresy in an interview with Frank Viola. When asked why she chose to communicate through stories, she replied:

“Stories are powerful. Jesus used them all the time to communicate truths to his followers. There’s a saying: ‘The longest journey a man must take is the eighteen inches from his head to his heart.’ A person may be convinced intellectually, but that doesn’t necessarily translate into action. THE DISTANCE, IF YOU CAPTURE A PERSON’S HEART, THEIR BELIEF SYSTEM CATCHES UP VERY QUICKLY. Stories tug at our hearts and are more likely to produce change” (“My Interview with Felicity Dale: An Army of Ordinary People,” April 29, 2010, Beyond Evangelical blog).

To “capture a person’s heart” apart from “a belief system” is blind emotional mysticism.

The fact is that Jesus didn’t teach in stories to communicate truths to His followers in a way superior to didactic teaching. He taught in parables *to hide the truth from willful unbelievers*.

“And the disciples came, and said unto him, WHY SPEAKEST THOU UNTO THEM IN PARABLES? He answered and said unto them, BECAUSE IT IS GIVEN UNTO YOU TO KNOW THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, BUT TO THEM IT IS NOT GIVEN. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. THEREFORE SPEAK I TO THEM IN PARABLES BECAUSE THEY SEEING SEE NOT; AND HEARING THEY HEAR NOT, NEITHER DO THEY UNDERSTAND. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:10-15).

Jesus’ sermons were mostly composed of straightforward didactic content. Consider for example the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and His sermon on the Second

Coming in Matthew 24. Further, the sermons and writings of the Lord's prophets and apostles in Acts and the Epistles overwhelmingly consist of direct "belief system" teaching rather than "heart tugging" stories.

Wolfgang Simson's mysticism is evident in the way that he contrasts "old style preaching" with "new style preaching." He says the old style proclaims "the naked truth" whereas the new style "hints at the mysteries of the kingdom and makes people curious." The old style puts explanation before experience, whereas the new style puts experience before explanation.

Mysticism is the error of the contemporary praise music movement, with its "open yourself to the flow of the music" philosophy. The music itself--with its powerful body-moving rhythms and its emotion-wrenching non-resolving chord sequences and its hypnotic repetition--creates the mystical experience that the contemporary worshiper is seeking.

Mysticism is the error of the charismatic experience orientation which refuses to put "God in a box" and therefore accepts such nonsense as unintelligible gibberish as supposed "tongues," spirit slaying, holy laughter, holy drunkenness, bogus "healings," and bogus "words of knowledge."

For more about mysticism see the book *Contemplative Mysticism*, which is available in print and eBook editions from the online catalog at Way of Life. See also the free eBook *The God of End-Time Mysticism*, which is also available at the Way of Life web site.

The Heresy of New Age Panentheism

Contemplative mysticism often leads souls to the pagan doctrine of panentheism--the belief that God is in everything--which denies the fall and the curse as defined biblically. Contemplative practitioners often become enamored with out-and-out New Agers.

Consider Leonard Sweet, who has co-authored books with house church guru Frank Viola and is quoted by other leaders such as Neil Cole.

Sweet is devoted to contemplative mysticism. He wrote:

"Mysticism, once cast to the sidelines of the Christian tradition, is now situated in postmodernist culture near the center. ... In the words of one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, Jesuit philosopher of religion/dogmatist Karl Rahner, 'The Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic, one who has experienced something, or he will be nothing'" (*Quantum Spirituality*, 1991, pp. 11, 76).

In light of this unhesitating recommendation of mysticism and of the Roman Catholic universalist/panentheist Karl Rahner, who was a bridge between Catholicism and Eastern religions, it is no wonder that Sweet is a New Age sympathizer if not an out-and-out New Ager.

Sweet promotes a universalistic-tinged doctrine that he calls New Light and "quantum spirituality" and "the Christ consciousness." He describes it in terms of "the union of the human with the divine" which is the "center feature of all the world's religions" (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 235). He defines the New Light as "a structure of human becoming, a channeling of Christ energies through mindbody experience" (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 70). Sweet says that

“New Light pastors” hold the doctrine of “embodiment of God in the very substance of creation” (p. 124).

In *Carpe Mañana*, Sweet says that the earth is as much a part of the body of Christ as humans and that humanity and the earth constitute “a cosmic body of Christ” (p. 124).

Sweet says that some of the “New Light leaders” that have influenced his thinking are Matthew Fox, M. Scott Peck, Willis Harman, and Ken Wilber. These are prominent New Agers who believe in the divinity of man, as we have documented in the book *The New Age Tower of Babel*.

For more information on this see the following reports at www.wayoflife.org --

- “Thomas Merton”
- “Beware of Leonard Sweet”
- “Contemplative Practices Are a Bridge to Paganism”
- “Contemplative Spirituality Dancing with Demons”
- “Contemplative Spirituality and the New Age”
- “Silence vs. the Silence”

These are only some of the heresies that populate the jungle of the house church movement today.

Scriptures Misused by the House Church Movement

The following are some Scriptures that are widely abused within the house church movement:

Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

This is one of the proof texts used frequently in the house church movement. For example, House2House cites this verse as the authority for its definition of a church, which is “simply a group of people getting together with Christ as their center, and the Bible as the ultimate authority.”

This confuses a fellowship of believers with a New Testament church. Whenever two or three born again believers gather together that is a fellowship of brethren and Jesus is present, but that is not a proper church by the Biblical standard.

The churches established by the apostles were organized and educated along biblical lines, had duly-qualified, ordained elders, and practiced discipline (Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5; 1 Corinthians 5).

A church typically begins with the fellowshiping together of a few saints, but to be a *proper* New Testament church more than this is required. Paul wrote to Titus in regard to the situation in Crete and said that some things were lacking, and the first thing that was lacking was the ordination of qualified elder/bishops (Titus 1:5-17).

Whether or not a gathering of believers can be called a “church” before it is scripturally organized with its own ordained pastors is really not the issue. In our missionary work in South Asia many churches have been started. Usually the new fellowships are born out of the ministry of a “mother” church. Before the fellowships are fully organized so that they can stand on their own feet, we call them churches, but we know that until a church is set up with its own duly-constituted leadership and discipline things are “lacking” before God.

1 Corinthians 14:26 “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”

This is another major proof text used by the house church movement to support its philosophy that church services should be “open and participatory” without authoritative leadership or preaching ministries.

Let’s consider the context of this verse, which is the first principle of sound Bible interpretation. Paul was not saying that this is to be the standard pattern for every church service in every congregation throughout the age; he was simply stating the fact that this was the pattern for the services AT CARNAL CORINTH WHERE SPIRITUAL GIFTS WERE BEING ABUSED.

The church at Corinth is not a model church to imitate!

Paul was not writing to Corinth to encourage them to continue what they were doing; he was writing to correct what they were doing! He didn’t say, “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together LET EVERY ONE OF

YOU HAVE a psalm, have a doctrine AND LET THIS BE THE MANNER OF EVERY CHURCH SERVICE.” He didn’t write this as a commandment or an authoritative formula. Rather, he simply described what they were doing in the context of correcting it.

He corrected their practice, for example, by limiting tongues speaking in two ways (verses 27-28) and by restricting both tongues speaking and prophesying to men only (verses 34-35).

Paul further stated in the same context that both tongues speaking and prophesying were temporary gifts that would vanish away (1 Cor. 13:8). The book of Acts tells us that this happened even before the death of the apostles. Tongues speaking is only mentioned three times in Acts: on Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4), at the conversion of Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10:46), and at the baptism of Apollos’ disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:6). That’s it for tongues! About A.D. 58 is the last time tongues speaking is mentioned in the divinely-inspired history of the early churches.

It was about that time that Paul wrote his first epistle to the church at Corinth to correct their abuse of spiritual gifts. Tongues aren’t mentioned in any other New Testament epistle. Paul explained that tongues speaking was a sign to the unbelieving Jewish nation that God was doing a new thing (1 Cor. 14:20-22). The tongues were a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 28:11-12, where the prophet said that though God would speak to Israel in other tongues, they would not hear. This is exactly what happened. With the establishment of the first churches and the destruction of the Jewish Temple, the need for the sign was finished and church history tells that both tongues speaking and prophesying (in

the sense of imparting new revelation) vanished except among heretical cults. Tongues ceased because their function as a sign to Israel was no longer needed, and prophesying ceased because the canon of Scripture was completed and the only type of prophesying that is needed now is the Spirit-led preaching and teaching of Scripture.

The fact is that we are only given a couple of glimpses into the actual services of the early churches, and the reason for that is that the Spirit of God has granted much freedom in this matter so that churches can be adapted to every time and culture for the efficient outworking of the Great Commission on a global scale for over 2,000 years.

While the house church movement uses 1 Corinthians 14:26 in a legalistic manner, they either ignore or explain away Acts 20:7, which is another Biblical glimpse into early church services.

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

Here we see a direct contradiction of and refutation of the house church principle, because we see Paul preaching to the congregation. The church in Troas wasn't sitting around discussing spiritual matters on an equal basis. They were listening to a long sermon by an authority figure, and they were doing so on the Lord's Day.

House church leaders explain this away by various tactics, including the claim that the Greek doesn't really say that Paul was preaching. Consider the following exercise in the abuse of Scripture:

"[In Acts 20:7] the original Greek doesn't say here quite what the English translation conveys. ... It denotes a two-way verbal trafficking between different parties and is actually the Greek word from which we get the English word 'dialogue.' ... in the New Testament, when the Lord's people come together on Sundays as a church, it's strictly dialogue that goes on, and this is precisely what Paul is doing here" (*House Church*, edited by Steve Atkerson, p. 133).

So Atkerson would have us believe that the believers were sitting around dialoguing with Paul rather than keenly listening to his authoritative apostolic instruction. What a ridiculous idea!

In fact, "preach" is a perfectly accurate translation, and it is obvious from the context that preaching was exactly what Paul was doing. He wasn't merely discussing or dialoguing. He was proclaiming God's Word authoritatively.

The word "preach" is used 136 times in the New Testament. John the Baptist was a preacher (Mat. 3:1). Jesus was a preacher (Mat. 11:1). The apostles were preachers (Acts 5:42). Philip was a preacher (Acts 8:35). Paul was a preacher (Acts 9:27). The first foreign missionaries were preachers (Acts 13:5, 42). They didn't merely preach in the public squares and synagogues. Acts 5:42 says that the apostles preached from house to house, and Acts 15:35 says Paul and Barnabas preached in the church at Antioch. Timothy was commanded to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). To say that this preaching cannot be done in the church services is ridiculous. God's Word puts no such restriction upon preaching.

In our missionary work, we have testimony times in our churches, when the men are encouraged to share things with the congregation. We also allow the women to give testimonies in some services and to share prayer requests as

long as they don't teach. But none of this replaces the authoritative preaching and teaching of God's Word by pastors and other ministry-gifted men, which is specifically commanded in Scripture. Spiritually-gifted men are to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). They are to speak "with all authority" (Titus 2:15). They are to speak as "the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

Luke 11:2 "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth."

This verse is often used to support the "kingdom now" heresy, which is a gross abuse of Scripture.

This isn't a commandment for believers to build the kingdom in this present time. It is a prayer that GOD will bring His kingdom to earth! And when we compare Scripture with Scripture, we see that this will occur when the King returns to earth at His Second Coming.

We have dealt with this in the section on the kingdom of God in the chapter on the heresies of the house church movement.

The Legalism of the House Church Movement

Legalism is a term often abused today, but there are two aspects to legalism as defined biblically. It is adding works to grace for salvation as the Galatian legalizers did (Gal. 1:6-9). And it is exalting human tradition to the same level of authority as Scripture, as the Pharisees did (Mat. 15:1-9).

To make the silence of Scripture an authority is to commit the sin of legalism. This was the error addressed by Paul in Romans 14. He warned against judging others on the basis of the Bible's silence, and he used the examples of diet as an example (Romans 14:1-4). There is no authoritative New Testament diet which must be observed by every believer. On this the New Testament is silent. Thus it is wrong to make laws about diet and to judge others on this basis.

The Pharisees were true legalists. The fundamentalist Bible-believer is often called a Pharisee today because of his zeal for the Word of God, but this is a slander. The Pharisee's error was not his love for the truth and his zeal for Bible righteousness. The Pharisee did not love the truth; he loved tradition (Mat. 15:1-9). If the Pharisee had loved the truth, he would have loved Jesus Christ (John 8:47)! The Pharisee did not love Bible righteousness; he loved his own self-righteousness (Lk. 18:9-14). The Pharisee did not have a true zeal for God; he had a zeal for his own false religion (Mat. 23:15). To call the fundamentalist Bible-believing Christian who is saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and who loves the precious Word of God and who is trying to obey God by earnestly contending for the faith a Pharisee is a wicked and untrue slander.

The house church movement is filled with true legalism, particularly in the sense of adding tradition to the Word of God and making laws on the basis of the Bible's silence.

I am not saying that all house churches are legalistic, but if the shoe fits wear it!

Many house churches are legalistic about buildings

Some of the books on house churches make the claim that a proper New Testament church MUST meet in a house.

There is an entire chapter in *Pagan Christianity* by Frank Viola and George Barna on the supposed "error" of church buildings.

"The first churches consistently met in homes. Until the year 300 we know of no buildings first built as churches" (Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*, location 333).

"All the traditional reasons put forth for 'needing' a church building collapse under careful scrutiny" (*Pagan Christianity*, location 596).

"There does not exist a shred of biblical support for the church building" (*Pagan Christianity*, location 602).

While it is true that Rome's doctrine of "sacred" church buildings and cathedrals is unscriptural, this does not mean that there is anything wrong with a church having its own building. Viola is again making a law from the Bible's silence, which he has no authority to do. Nowhere does the Bible forbid a congregation to own property or to have its own building.

Even if it were true that churches didn't have buildings before the third century, this means nothing. Further, it is an argument largely from silence since most of the record from

the first two centuries has not survived. Prior to the reign of Constantine, churches were generally not welcome in the Roman Empire, and the believers were bitterly persecuted. Under such a circumstance it would not have been practical for churches to have their own buildings. During our first ten years as missionaries in Nepal, it was illegal to preach the gospel and to baptize, so churches had to operate underground without drawing attention to themselves. In those days, most churches met in rented houses and did not have their own buildings. After the laws changed in the 1990s and there was more freedom, churches began to purchase property. It was a simple matter of practicality.

The New Testament mentions house churches four times (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2). But nowhere does the New Testament forbid a church to meet in a building other than a house.

In fact, Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 11:22 that the church at Corinth met somewhere other than a house for their main services.

The bottom line is that nowhere does the New Testament indicate that it is wrong for a church to rent or own a building. If a church needs a building, let it have a building. It's none of the business of Frank Viola or George Barna or anyone else.

Where a church meets is irrelevant. It can meet in a home, a barn, a store front, or its own building. Oftentimes new churches start out in homes and then move to their own building as they grow.

It's a simple matter of practicality, and to make a doctrine about buildings is to make laws beyond Scripture, which is true legalism.

Many house churches are legalistic about Sunday School and youth ministries

Many house churches not only don't have Sunday Schools or youth ministries, they claim that these are unscriptural.

This is an argument from the silence of Scripture, which is no argument at all.

We have dealt with this under the chapter on "The Challenge of the House Church Movement," but we will repeat that here by way of emphasis because we are convinced this is such an important truth.

The Bible says nothing one way or the other about Sunday School or VBS or a children's ministry or a youth ministry or a seniors' ministry or a college & career ministry.

What the Bible does say is that the churches are to preach the gospel to every creature, to teach God's people "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," and to train faithful men (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:20; 2 Tim. 2:2).

Largely it is up to each church to determine how to get this job done within the boundaries of Scripture (not within the boundaries of the Scripture's silence).

Sunday School is neither scriptural nor unscriptural. It is simply a program that can be used to accomplish the Lord's Great Commission or it is a program that can be a waste of time, depending on whether it is Spirit-empowered and

Bible-based and taught by the right people or whether it is a lifeless religious ritual that bores people to tears. I have seen Sunday Schools that are operated both ways. The same is true for Vacation Bible School and youth ministries and other sorts of “programs.”

Many “home church” or “family church” or “integrated church” people who have rejected Sunday Schools and youth ministries are as tradition-bound as those who use these ministries. They avoid these ministries “out of conviction,” claiming that it is only the job of families to teach children and youth; but there is absolutely nothing in Scripture that forbids churches from teaching them.

In fact, the churches have a commission from Christ to teach everyone. Christ put no limitation on the Great Commission as far as the age of those who are to be taught the gospel and disciplined in the “all things” that Christ has delivered to us in the canon of the New Testament faith. Thus, it is not only the job of parents to teach children and youth; it is also the job of the churches, and if they decide to do this through a Sunday School or a biblically-operated youth ministry of some sort, no one can take the Bible and say this is wrong and no one can therefore rightly condemn it.

While it is wrong to have a worldly, entertainment-oriented youth ministry, because such a thing has no authority in Scripture and in fact is condemned in Scripture (e.g., “be not conformed to this world,” Romans 12:2), it is not wrong to have a “youth ministry” as such if it is properly designed and geared toward fulfillment of such commandments as Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19-20.

To make laws *against* Sunday Schools and youth ministries in general is legalism.

Many house churches are legalistic about the number of members

The following statements could be multiplied from house church writings:

“The experts claim that 15-20 adults is the maximum number that you should let a house church grow to” (House2House FAQ).

“If we cross the twenty-barrier, the group stops being organic and starts to become formal, even feeling the need to follow a set agenda” (Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book*, p. 3).

“We may have to change our mind-set to realize that an average church would then be just eight, ten, or twelve people; a large church, fifteen; and a ‘megachurch’ would include not thousands of attendees, but twenty-one or twenty-two” (*The House Church Book*, p. 4).

There is zero biblical authority for this doctrine. It is typically based on various heresies such as the idea that a church should not be “led” by authoritative pastors.

Many house churches are legalistic about single women

As we will see in the chapter on the Integrated Church, there is legalism pertaining to what a young unmarried woman can and cannot do. According to the thinking of Vision Forum and others the female is under her father’s authority even after she is grown unless and until she is married.

The following is a review of a Vision Forum book and DVD by a fundamentalist home schooling mother that investigated their materials:

“The two items I have reviewed are the book ‘So Much More,’ a book to daughters about how to have ‘vision’ for the kingdom of God. And the DVD ‘The Return of the Daughters,’ a

documentary on the whole idea of daughters staying under their father's roof until marriage. On the surface these items seemed to be very God-honoring. Yet, I had an unsettled feeling that something just wasn't quite right. On the DVD, it seemed very touching to want to 'protect' your daughters in the way they suggest. What Christian father wouldn't want to do the best for his daughter? Being a home school father, my husband wanted to have an open heart to what the Lord may be leading him to in the future. We spent all these years training her to be a keeper at home and as she becomes an adult, we do not want to just 'throw her to the wolves.' This is exactly what the DVD suggests you are doing if you don't keep your daughter at home until marriage. ... The book had much material that seemed on the surface to be great. It mentioned modest dress, Christian femininity, etc. Yet, it warned daughters against an independent spirit and self-sufficiency to the point of calling working for anyone other than your dad, selfish and Marxist. It also mentioned if daughters did not have families that agreed with this vision, they should find a family that would adopt them into their families so they could fulfill this role. The whole idea was the family should not be split up at church and if you wanted to be a visionary daughter you better find a family in one of their Integrated churches so you could be a part. It was such nonsense as I have led 'bus kids' to Christ in junior church and have wondered how they would have fit in at church without any families to adopt them. There were so many other glaring flaws, often times they used Scripture quotes that were intended to be commands for our relationship to Christ, and they twisted it to be for our relationship to earthly fathers."

To teach that young women cannot leave their father's roof unless they are married is going beyond Scripture and putting man-made yokes on God's people.

Though we agree that we are not to follow the dictates and ways of today's feministic-influenced society (Psalm 1:1; Rom. 12:3) and children are to obey their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1), this does not mean that we have to submit to man-made laws that go beyond this. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice.

We deal more with this in the chapter on "The Integrated Church."

The Doctrine of Apostasy: A Glaring Omission in House Church Writings

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Nowhere in the writings of prominent house church leaders have I found clear warnings about end-time apostasy and the great spiritual danger that exists throughout Christianity in our day.

In house church writings you can find (usually) vague warnings about false teaching in general, but there is no understanding of the Bible’s teaching on the progression of apostasy and its explosion at the end of the age.

One reason for this is the widespread adoption of Reformed theology with its replacement heresy (the church has replaced Israel) and its allegorical interpretation of prophecy.

As we have seen, most house church people are not looking for the imminent Rapture of New Testament saints preceded by great apostasy and followed immediately by the brief reign of the antichrist. Instead, they are looking for the building of the kingdom of God and an end-times revival of church purity.

The understanding of end-time apostasy is necessary to have a proper Christian worldview for these times.

The Bible's warnings of apostasy provide great light in a dark world and spiritual protection against the wiles of the devil.

1. The doctrine of apostasy teaches us to have a testing mindset so that we will not be deceived by false teachers (Acts 17:11; 1 Th. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:8).

2. The doctrine of apostasy makes sense of the multiplicity of theologies, sects, and cults. The pure unity that so many are pursuing in the ecumenical movement did not exist even in the first century and it certainly won't exist now, at the end of the church age. Such a unity flies in the face of the warnings about apostasy.

3. The doctrine of apostasy makes sense of the onslaught of end-time unbelief in the form of theological modernism, unitarianism, evolution, humanism, communism, agnosticism and atheism, etc. Those who believe what the Bible teaches about the onslaught of apostasy are not puzzled by these things.

4. The doctrine of apostasy is a powerful evidence that the Bible is true and is useful as an apologetic, because its ancient prophecies are so specific and amazing and are so obviously being fulfilled in our day. When working with secular university students and atheists I point out that the confusion that exists in Christianity and the crimes committed by the Roman Catholic Church are actually evidence of the Bible's divine inspiration, as such things were prophesied beforehand in the New Testament.

5. The doctrine of apostasy enables us to rightly interpret the history of the Biblical text. It is because of this doctrine that we understand that an "Alexandrian" or "Egyptian" text of

the 3rd or 4th century would not be the correct text, since this region was a hotbed of apostasy. The doctrine of apostasy further enlightens us to reject the findings of apostate textual critics. (See The Modern Bible Version Hall of Shame, which is available in print and eBook editions from Way of Life Literature -- www.wayoflife.org.)

6. This doctrine enables us to properly interpret archaeology. The doctrine of apostasy explains why so much of the archaeological research has been done with an incredible bias against the Bible. As Dr. Bryan Wood observes, “Secular scholars are generally of the opinion that any aspect of the early history of Israel prior to the kingdom period cannot be taken at face value unless the veracity of the events described can be validated by means of independent witnesses. This approach is strongly biased and nonscientific. Other ancient documents are assumed to be accurate unless there is credible evidence to suggest otherwise. These documents are just as religious as the Bible, as the writers of ancient texts regularly mention their pagan gods and what the gods did on their behalf” (“Extra-Biblical Evidence for the Conquest,” *Bible and Spade*, Fall 2005).

Introduction

The word “apostasy” means to turn from the faith. The phrase “turn away their ears” in 2 Timothy 4:4 is from the Greek word “apostrepho.”

The apostasy began in the days of the apostles (1 John 2:18) and it will increase throughout the Church Age (2 Tim. 3:13).

This truth is woven into the very design of the New Testament canon. There are increasing references to and warnings about apostasy and false teaching as the canon

progresses, from Matthew to Revelation. We will see that in this study.

The following survey on the Bible's doctrine of apostasy will be a great study for every House Church!

Psalm 2

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. 6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. 7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. 10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

1. This Psalm is prophetic. It looks forward to the time of Christ's return.

Christ is a Greek word that means “anointed.” It is equivalent to the Hebrew word Messiah, which is found in Psalm 2:2. Jesus is anointed of God as Lord and Saviour. He

is the Seed of Abraham who inherits the covenants of God. He is the Son of David who will rule on the throne of God's kingdom.

2. The Psalm has four parts:

Verses 1-5 are spoken by the Psalmist.

Verse 6 is spoken by God the Father.

Verses 7-9 are spoken by God the Son.

Verses 10-12 are again spoken by the Psalmist.

3. The Psalm describes two members of the Trinity, the Father and the Son (Psa. 2:7). Jehovah God makes a decree to the Son. They act in harmony in everything. They have one will, one character, one plan.

4. The events described in the Psalm are as follows:

a. The Gentile kings and their people will unite in rebellion against Jehovah God and His Anointed (Psa. 2:1-3).

The "heathen" refer to the pagan nations that are separate from Israel and outside of her covenant relationship with God. The Hebrew word translated "heathen" is "gowy," and in the Psalms it is also translated "nations" (Psa. 9:17). The heathen are those that have forgotten the true God of the Bible (Psa. 9:17) and do not call upon His name (Psa. 79:6) and that worship idols (Psa. 135:15).

The heathen truly hate the God of the Bible. They rage against Him. This is a strong word and it aptly describes the attitude of the unsaved toward God. The world today is filled with rage and blasphemy against the Almighty.

The reason for the rage is man's rebellion against God's authority and His holy Law (Psa. 2:3). They want to cast off

His cords and live according to the lust of their flesh and follow the dictates of their vain imagination. They want to be free of restraint.

The rage began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's law not to eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil (Gen. 3). It continued when Cain killed his own prophet brother and built a city that was in rebellion to God's law (Gen. 4).

The rage has grown in intensity through the centuries. It resulted in Christ's rejection and crucifixion. It was exhibited at the cross, when mankind crucified the Lord of glory. The world said, "We will not have this man to rule over us" (Luke 19:14). Christ "came unto his own, and His own received him not" (John 1:11). Even His own people, the Jews, rejected Him.

The rage is worldwide today. The entertainment industry is raging against God. So are the fields of literature and fashion and art. The mainstream news media rages against God and flaunts His laws and regularly casts doubt upon His Word. False religion is in a rage against the true and living God. Evolution is a rage against God. Atheism is a rage against God. Communism is a rage against God. The rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a rage against God. He paid a great price to purchase salvation for fallen mankind, but for the most part they reject the offer. One preacher told me that in London, England, in his experience only one in 100 people will even take a gospel tract.

The rage is getting louder all of the time, and it will culminate in one final generation when the armies of the world align themselves to fight against Christ at the Battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:9-14; 14:17-20; 19:11-21).

Notice that the heathen take counsel together. They are unified in their objective to throw off God's Law. This is the end-time Babel which is described in Revelation 17-18. We might also see a hint here of the communication technology of the last days, whereby men can effectively communicate their rage against God instantly from one end of the earth to the other, both by voice and picture.

b. God will laugh at them, because puny man cannot thwart His plans. God is Almighty, and Jesus has been given all power in heaven and in earth (Mat. 28:18).

c. God will establish Christ's kingdom with its headquarters in Zion or Jerusalem in spite of worldwide opposition.

The kingdom will be established by judgment (Psa. 2:5). This refers to the Great Tribulation during which God will judge mankind for its pride and rebellion (Isaiah 2:10-22). God has been patient for a long time and has withheld the fury of His wrath toward man's rebellion, but the day will come when His wrath will be poured out in the Great Tribulation, culminating in the destruction of Antichrist's armies at Christ's return.

The kingdom will be established by God's power (Psa. 2:6).

The kingdom will be headquartered in Jerusalem (Psa. 2:6). "Zion" was originally a name for one of the hills of Jerusalem. It refers to a citadel and was the site conquered by King David (2 Sam 5:7; 1 Ch. 11:5). Eventually, the word *Zion* came to refer to the entire city of Jerusalem (Psa. 48:2; 65:1; 102:21; Isa. 2:3; 8:18).

The kingdom will be worldwide (Psa. 2:8).

The kingdom will be ruled with a rod of iron (Psa. 2:9). This refers to a rule of law and justice. In that day the Word of the Lord will be the law of the entire earth (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2), and it will be enforced with a rod of iron. This means that the enforcement of Christ's law will be certain and inflexible. In that day no one will be able to escape justice through their position or relations or friendships or popularity or beauty or a bribe or the machinations of a clever lawyer. Justice and righteousness will reign because injustice and unrighteousness will be punished and punished properly and quickly. Saints rather than sinners will sit on the throne of judgment. God's Word rather than man's opinion will be the law.

5. Men are exhorted to submit to the Son of God and put their trust in Him now before it is too late (Psa. 2:10-12). This is a reference to the gospel of Christ and the offer of salvation which is being preached to the ends of the earth today.

a. God delights in mercy. He is not willing that any should perish (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

b. The kings and judges of the earth are exhorted to submit to Christ. God will save both high and low, rich and poor.

c. Men are told to submit in fear and trembling. This is repentance and its evidence. God is willing to save the king in his palace as well as the pauper in his hovel, and all are saved in the same way.

d. Men are exhorted to kiss the son (Psa. 2:12). This is defined in the same verse and means to submit to Him and to put one's trust in him. In the Bible the kiss signifies reconciliation (Gen. 33:4), honor (Ex. 18:7; 1 Sam. 10:1),

worship (1 Ki. 19:18; Job 31:27), and affection (Gen. 48:10). Thus it is an apt term to describe the believer's relationship with Christ. We are reconciled to God through Christ's blood; we honor Him as Lord and Saviour; we worship Him as the only Lord; we love him because He first loved us.

e. Men are warned that the opportunity for salvation will end ("be wise now," Psa. 2:10). Compare 2 Corinthians 6:2.

Matthew 7:15-23

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. 21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

1. Jesus warned that there will be false teachers (v. 15).
2. Protection requires caution and spiritual discernment. The Christian is warned not to be gullible, not to accept every man who claims to be a preacher, every man who comes in Christ's name. This means a Christian must exercise

judgment. In verses 1-5, Jesus forbids hypocritical judgment, but in verses 15-23, He commends judgment of false teachers. We judge them by God's Word.

3. False teachers can have the appearance of godliness ("come to you in sheep's clothing," v. 15). They deceive by appearing to be true preachers. They have Bibles; they talk about Jesus and salvation and right living. They have churches and they teach doctrine.

4. False teachers are known by their fruit (vv. 16-20).

The fruit is not works; in verses 22-23 Jesus says that false teachers will do "many wonderful works."

The fruit is biblical salvation (v. 23) and obedience (v. 21) and doctrinal truth. The sure fruit of a false teacher is his false doctrine (Acts 20:30; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:6-7; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1-2).

Consider Mother Teresa. She did many wonderful works in caring for the poor and sick in the neediest parts of the world, but she trusted in a false gospel and taught heresies. The 2007 book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* contains statements made by the nun to her Catholic confessors and superiors over a period of more than 66 years. She continually referred to her spiritual condition as "my darkness" and to Jesus as "the Absent One." In March 1953 she wrote, "... there is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started 'the work.'" At the suggestion of one confessor she wrote the following to Jesus: "I call, I cling, I want -- and there is no One to answer -- no One on Whom I can cling -- no, no One. -- Alone ... Where is my Faith -- even deep down right in there is nothing, but emptiness &

darkness. ... When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven -- there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives & hurt my very soul. -- I am told God loves me -- and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul." In 1962 she wrote: "If I ever become a Saint -- I will surely be one of 'darkness.'" In 1984 we interviewed Sister Ann of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. Ann said that they do not try to convert dying Hindus to Christ but simply instruct them to pray to their gods.

We know that Mother Teresa was a false prophet because of what she believed.

5. Jesus warned that there will be many unsaved professing Christians (Mat. 7:21-23). Salvation is not a religious act, but a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He says to these professors, "I never knew you."

6. The working of miracles is not a sure evidence of the truth ("prophesied ... cast out devils," v. 22). John Wimber, head of the Vineyard Association of Churches, was drawn into Charismatic error after Paul Cain told him secrets of his life, but the devil knows such things, too.

Matthew 13:1-52

"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; 4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: 5 Some fell upon stony places, where

they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: 6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: 8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. 9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. 10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? 11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. 12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. 13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. 17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. 18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. 19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received

seed by the way side. 20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; 21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. 22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. 23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: 25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. 26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? 28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. 31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: 32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches

thereof. 33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. 34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: 35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. 36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. 37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; 39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. 40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; 42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. 44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: 46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: 48 Which,

when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. 49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, 50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. 52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old. 53 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. 54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? 57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. 58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”

In this passage Christ told the mysteries of the kingdom which describe the course of the Church Age.

The Background

1. Jesus came and presented Himself to Israel as the promised Messiah and King (Mat. 1-10). We know that Jesus did not come to establish the Messianic kingdom; He came to die for man's sin; but He did show Himself as the

Messiah. His rejection was necessary for the fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 53:3).

2. He was publicly rejected by Israel's leaders and representatives (Mat. 11-12; see especially 12:22-28).

3. Christ then offered Himself to anyone who would come-- Jew or Gentile. It was not until Matthew chapter 11:28-30 that Christ made this offer.

4. Having turned to the Gentiles, Christ now reveals the "mystery" period of the kingdom (Mat. 13:11).

A New Testament "mystery" is something hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New (Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:3-6).

The term "mysteries of the kingdom" in Matthew 13:11 refers to the course of the church age. This age was not foretold in Old Testament prophecy and is thus called a "mystery." Old Testament prophecy saw the first and second comings of Christ, but it did not see the Church Age lying in between these great events. The Church Age is like a valley in between mountain peaks. When we lived in the Kathmandu Valley in the 1980s Nepal wasn't as polluted as it is today and oftentimes you could see Mount Everest from certain parts of the valley. Between us and the world's highest mountain several other mountain peaks were visible, and in between these were unseen valleys. Likewise, Old Testament prophecy saw the peaks of the first and second coming of Christ, but it did not see the valley of the Church Age in between. The Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom revealed that Christ would suffer (Isa. 53) and would reign (Isa. 9:6-7). Nothing is mentioned, though, in Old Testament prophecy about a period of time in between

these two great events in which God would set aside the nation Israel and build the Church composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

The Parables of Matthew 13

1. Consider the purpose of the parables: Jesus taught these parables to reveal the truth of the Church Age to believers and to hide it from unbelievers (Mat. 13:10-17). It is important to note that God does not arbitrarily blind some and open the eyes of others. It is those who do not receive the truth who are blinded. See Ezekiel 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12.

2. Consider the message of the parables as a whole: They describe the course of the Church Age as that of increasing apostasy and error, until the whole is leavened (v. 33). The whole will be leavened when the true saints are Raptured and the Great Whore Church of Revelation 17 will rule with the Antichrist.

3. The meaning of the individual parables:

The Sower (Mat. 13:3-9, 18-23)

The Main Message: The gospel will be preached to all nations and resisted by the devil.

a. The gospel begins to be preached worldwide and falls upon every kind of soil--signifying people and nations. Only a small percentage of gospel seed falls on good soil. Most men will not be saved.

b. Salvation requires receiving the Word of God (v. 23). Compare Lk. 8:12 "lest they should believe and be saved."

c. The devil is very aggressive in trying to keep people from Christ (v. 19). Compare Mk. 4:15 “Satan cometh immediately.”

d. The one who falls away does not have Christ. The “root” in verse 21 is Christ (Isa. 11:1, 10; 53:2; Rev. 5:5; 22:11).

e. Even a true Christian can be unfruitful if he is not careful about how he lives (v. 22).

There is the danger of care and anxiety (v. 22). There is the danger of riches (v. 22). There is the danger of pleasures (Lk. 8:14).

The Tares (Mat. 13:24-30; 36-43)

The Main Message: The devil will raise up false Christians and churches alongside the truth.

a. False Christians and true will grow together in the world during this age.

b. The false cannot be destroyed until the end of the age (v. 30).

This does not refer to sin and error in the churches but to sin and error in the world (v. 38). Thus the ecumenical interpretation is wrong. Many misuse this parable to teach that we should not exercise discipline or separate from false or compromising Christians, but that we should wait for the Lord to do the separating. The New Testament epistles plainly teach us to separate out those who sin in the churches (1 Cor. 5) and to mark and avoid those that teach false doctrine and that follow false forms of Christianity (Rom.

16:17; 2 Tim. 3:5) and even to avoid true brethren who refuse to obey God's Word (2 Thess. 3:6).

This shows that Rome's doctrine of persecuting and destroying those she considered false was wrong. The churches have no authority to judge or punish sinners in the world.

The Mustard Seed (Mat. 13:31-32)

The Main Message: The small, despised true church is replaced with a large, impressive false one.

a. The "church" experiences abnormal growth and becomes the home of evil things.

b. A seed intended to produce a vegetable plant becomes a tree.

c. The birds are revealed as evil in verse four. They are demons and professing Christians and teachers controlled by demons. Compare I Timothy 4:1 and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

d. This is exactly what has happened. The simple New Testament church that Christ established has become one of the largest religions in the world, but it is mostly apostate and full of demonic teachings and activities.

The Hidden Leaven (Mt. 13:33)

The Main Message: Christianity will gradually increase in error until it is entirely apostate. "Till the whole was leavened."

a. The woman depicts unqualified and false teachers. Compare 1 Timothy 2:12. The false religious system in Revelation 17 is pictured as a woman.

b. The leaven pictures evil.

It depicts evil doctrine (Mat. 16:6, 12; Gal. 5:7-9) and evil works (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

The Treasure Hid in a Field (v. 44)

The Main Message: This parable depicts Christ's purchase and preservation of Israel (Ex. 19:5; Psa. 135:4; Rom. 11:25-26).

a. The field is the world in which Israel has been scattered.

b. Christ bought the field with His blood (1 Jn. 2:2).

The Merchant Seeking Goodly Pearls (vv. 45-46)

The Main Message: This parable depicts Christ's purchase and unity of the church.

a. Some lessons about the pearl:

The pearl is formed by an irritation caused in the body of the oyster by a foreign particle, depicting Christ being wounded for the church (Eph. 5:25; Isa. 53:5).

The pearl is valuable, reminding us that the purchase of the church required the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

b. It is important to emphasize that the church is not the same as Israel. See 1 Corinthians 10:32, which describes three different groups of people in the world today: Jews, Gentiles,

and the Church. Christ loved and died for and preserves both Israel and the Church, but they are different entities.

The Net that Gathered Every Kind (vv. 47-50)

The Main Message: This parable is similar to the parable of the tares, teaching that both false and true Christians will grow together in the world.

- a. Just because a person or church claims to know Christ, does not mean he is a true Christian (Mat. 7:21-23; Titus 1:16; 1 John 2:4).
- b. We must test everything by God's Word (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21).
- c. The true and false will be made evident at Christ's return (vv. 49-50).
- d. Christ preached much about hell and it is always described as a place of fire (v. 50).

Matthew 24:3-5, 11, 24

Matthew 24:3-5 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? **4** And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. **5** For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

Matthew 24:11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

Matthew 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

1. The end of the age will be characterized by great deception (vv. 4-5). This prophecy describes events during the seven years of the Time of Jacob's Trouble, but we know that apostasy and spiritual deception will increase throughout the church age and will therefore be vast even before the Great Tribulation begins.

2. It is the believer's responsibility to avoid being deceived (v. 4).

At an ecumenical conference in 1987 that included many Roman Catholics and much doctrinal confusion, one man told me that I was "too afraid of being deceived." He advised that I should relax and not worry so much about error, but that is *not* what the Lord Jesus Christ said. He warned us to be very cautious.

3. False teaching will be widespread. There will be many false christs (v. 5), many false teachers (v. 11), and many will be deceived by them (v. 11).

4. There will be deceiving miracles (v. 24). Every time miracles are mentioned in reference to the end of the church age, they are deceiving miracles. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:9 and Revelation 13:14.

5. There is a danger of even the saved being deceived (v. 24). Paul expressed the same concern in 2 Corinthians 11:1-4. A fear of this is one thing that motivated me to study the Bible

diligently after I was converted in 1973 and to cry out to God for the wisdom to interpret the Bible properly.

Acts 20:28-35

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. 32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

In this passage Paul warned about the coming apostasy in the context of his exhortation to the elders of the church at Ephesus. Consider some lessons from this passage:

1. It is the responsibility of pastors to guard the church (“take heed,” verse 28, “watch,” verse 31). False teaching cannot be ignored.

2. The false teachings will come both from within the church and from without (vv. 29-30).

3. False teachers are likened to grievous wolves, which devour sheep (v. 29). Note that the Bible speaks very plainly and has nothing positive to say about these men.

4. They speak “perverse” things (v. 30). The Greek word is “diastrepho,” and it is also translated “turn away” (Acts 13:8). It refers to any false teaching that turns people away from the truth. The word “perverse” again reminds us of how much God hates false doctrine through the strong language that the Spirit of God employs to describe it.

5. False teachers seek to make disciples for themselves (v. 30). Instead of making disciples of Christ, they make disciples of themselves.

6. Warning is essential (v. 31). If a man is not willing to warn plainly of sin and error, he should not be a preacher or church leader. The teaching of “positive truth” is not enough! God’s people desperately need godly reproof, and if the preacher is not willing to deliver the warning, no one else will.

7. The Word of God is sufficient and effective (v. 32). It is the final authority for faith and practice among the churches. Paul did not appeal to a church council or to tradition; he appealed directly to the Scriptures. And he said that the Scripture is “able to build you up.” God’s people must not neglect the Word of God. It must be at the center of the individual’s daily life, of the home, and of the church.

2 Corinthians 11:1-4, 12-15

2 Corinthians 11:1-4 Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. **2** For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. **3** But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. **4** For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

2 Corinthians 11:12-15 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. **13** For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. **14** And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. **15** Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

1. Even in the first century apostolic churches false teaching and apostasy were rife, and the churches were in imminent danger of being led astray.

2. Paul was very zealous in this matter, showing an example that needs to be followed by every preacher. We must guard carefully against error (vv. 1-3).

3. There is great spiritual danger for Christians (vv. 3-4). Paul was afraid for the Corinthian believers. It is possible for

true believers to be led astray, at least to some extent, and we must remain on guard at all times.

4. Paul warned of false christs, false gospels, and false spirits. The believer must be careful not to believe someone just because he talks about Christ or the gospel or the Spirit. Everything must be carefully tested by God's Word.

5. Paul's warning shows the error of the ecumenical philosophy that we should strive for unity with everyone who "loves Jesus." True Christian unity must be based on truth and not mere profession. False christs include the Mormon christ, the Jehovah's Witness christ, the wafer christ of the Catholic mass, the liberation theology christ, the modernistic christ, the cool, rock & roll party christ, New Age christs, the christ of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell*, and the non-judgmental christ of *The Shack*. False spirits include the Charismatic spirit that knocks people on the floor, makes them speak in meaningless gibberish, imparts to them holy laughter and makes them drunk. False gospels include the sacramental gospel, the baptismal regeneration gospel, the "four square" gospel, the sabbath-keeping gospel, the passover-keeping gospel, and the kingdom gospel.

6. The devil complicates doctrine ("so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," v. 3). The truth of God's Word is infinitely deep, but sound doctrine also has a basic simplicity that is comprehensible to ordinary people (Luke 10:21). Examples of the corruption of the simplicity that is in Christ are modernistic theologies, Calvinistic theology, and emerging church doctrine.

7. We see in verse 4 that the teaching of the apostles is the absolute standard for the truth ("whom WE have not

preached”). We have the teaching of the apostles in the New Testament Scriptures. This is the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) by which we are to measure teaching and practice. We don’t need the “church fathers” or “church councils” or later traditions or “the general sentiment of the church universal.”

8. The devil is clever and must be resisted with much wisdom and zeal (v. 3).

9. Broadmindedness in doctrinal matters is evidence of carnality, not spirituality. It was because the Corinthians were carnal (1 Cor. 3:1-2) that Paul feared that they might “well bear with” the false teachers (v. 4). This does not mean they would necessarily *follow* the false teaching, but that they would *put up with* it. Unlike the church of Ephesus which could not bear them which are evil and tried every teacher (Rev. 2:2), the carnal church of Corinth was careless. Being able to “see both sides” is not a mark of spirituality. There is only one side to the truth! The way of truth is narrow (Mat. 7:14).

10. False teachers imitate true teachers (vv. 13-15). They don’t invent new things; they pervert the old things. They have churches and Bibles and preach Jesus. The closer something is to the truth, the most difficult it is to discern its error.

11. False teachers claim authority equal to the apostles (v. 13). In the first century the false teachers were not afraid to exalt themselves against Jesus’ own apostles who had been personally chosen by Him and had seen the resurrected Saviour. How much more can we expect their children to follow this pattern through the centuries. The examples of those who have claimed apostolic authority are legion,

including the Roman Catholic Papacy, Joseph Smith, Moon, and Pentecostal “apostles and prophets.”

Galatians 1:6-9

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

1. We see again that false teachers were already extremely active in the first century.

2. New churches and Christians are in danger (“so soon removed,” v. 6). The lion particularly looks for stragglers and for the young. This is why every believer needs a good church for spiritual growth and protection. In the early days of my Christian life I struggled with false teaching (Pentecostalism, Seventh-day Adventism, misunderstanding of sanctification) and it was only after getting into a good church that I was straightened out and my feet were set on the right path. This reminds us that every church needs to properly disciple its people. The *One Year Discipleship Course* is a tool that we recommend. It is available in print and eBook editions from Way of Life Literature -- www.wayoflife.org.

3. False gospels add something to grace (v. 6). Romans 11:6 and other Scriptures plainly stated that grace and works cannot be mixed. If you mix any type of works with grace,

grace is no longer grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 defines grace as a free gift. If I require any payment whatsoever for a gift, it ceases to be a gift.

4. False gospels bring trouble rather than blessing (v. 7). They bring confusion and doubt and more error.

5. False gospels change the true gospel (v. 7). False gospels are not completely new and different; they merely change the true gospel in some way. False gospels talk about Christ and grace and faith and the cross and justification, but they twist the truth and add to it and subtract from it.

6. The Bible is the final authority (v. 8). It is the SOLE authority for faith and practice. It is the ultimate test of truth, and everything is to be examined by this Standard.

7. God's curse is upon false gospels AND upon those who preach them (vv. 8-9). To treat those who preach false gospels with respect and to pretend that they are true Christians is to treat them differently than Jesus Christ and the apostles treated them. They used strong language to condemn false teachers. They are under God's curse and we are not to support them or bless them (2 John 10-11).

Ephesians 4:11-14

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and

carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

This powerful passage in Paul’s Epistle to the church of Ephesus describes apostasy in terms of restless winds that blow here and there. The winds of error were already blowing in Paul’s day, and which have now reached hurricane force.

1. God-given teachers are necessary for protection from error (vv. 11-14).

2. Error is deceptive (“sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, where they lie in wait to deceive,” v. 14). False teachers use “good words and fair speeches” to deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18). Those who do not carefully test everything by the absolute Standard of God’s Word but who trust their “spiritual intuitions” are easily deceived, though they often think their way is superior to the “strict” Bible way.

3. Error is aggressive and restless and relentless (“wind of doctrine”).

4. Every church should be a Bible training school to produce strong believers (vv. 11-13). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

5. The apostolic goal is true and full unity of doctrine (v. 13), not an ecumenical “unity in diversity.”

6. Spiritually immature believers are susceptible to being tossed about by error (v. 14). Each believer needs to grow to become skillful in the use of God’s Word (Heb. 5:12-13).

Philippians 3:1-3

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. 3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

1. Again we see that Paul warned about error constantly and repeatedly (v. 1). The majority of his epistles contained such warnings.

2. Paul spoke plainly about false teachers (v. 2). The term “dog” refers to false teachers as lawless, ignorant, dangerous, useless, given to carnal appetites, snarling. Paul uses the term in plural referring to a pack of dogs running wild as they did in Israel of old (Ex. 22:31; 1 Kings 21:23; Jer. 15:3). The term “evil workers” refers to the fact that false teaching is dangerous and harmful and is a sin against the God of truth and Revelation. The term “concision” refers to circumcision and points to the Judaizers who were trying to combine the gospel with the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1).

3. Paul said false teachers are dangerous (v. 2). He is giving a solemn warning to beware of them. Discerning truth from error and resisting false teachers have never been a secondary matter in the Christian life.

4. Paul did not accept those who pervert the gospel as true Christians (v. 3). We saw the same thing in the Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1:7-9).

Philippians 3:17-19

“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (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: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)”

1. The apostles are the divinely-given examples for the churches to imitate and their writings are the standards of truth and righteousness (v 17).
2. There were already many false teachers in Paul’s day (v. 18).
3. Paul often warned about false teachers (v. 18).
4. Paul was greatly burdened about this problem (“now tell you even weeping,” v. 18). False teaching is no light matter.
5. Paul was very plain in his dealings with false teachers (v. 19). Here he is referring to those who teach “damnable heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). These are corruptions of “fundamental” doctrines such as the person of Christ, the nature of God, the Holy Spirit, and the gospel. Some “heresies” can be held by the saved, but some heresies are so severe that to hold them is to mark oneself as eternally damned.
6. There are different kinds of false teachers. Some deny the gospel; some the atonement; some corrupt the gospel. The false teachers described by Paul in Philippians 3 minded earthly things (v. 19). Modern examples of this include

Jehovah's Witnesses who claim that believers do not go to Heaven; those who focus on "kingdom building social justice" rather than preaching the gospel; and those who deny the resurrection (i.e., RSV translator Clarence Craig said, "the coming of Christ is to the hearts of those who love him; it is not for some future time").

Colossians 2:8-23

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. 9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. 18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up

by his fleshly mind, 19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. 20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”

1. Again we see that Paul often warned of false teachers (“beware,” v. 8). The believer must be on guard at all times and have a testing mindset.

2. False teachers are dangerous (“spoil you,” v. 8). The idea is to rob. False teachers want to rob believers of their absolute confidence in the truth of God’s Word and in the pure grace of Christ and to replace this with human tradition and philosophy.

3. False teachers add to God’s Word (v. 8 – “philosophy ... tradition of man”). The way to defeat them is to hold fast to the Bible as the divinely-inspired Word of God and as the sole authority for faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

4. False teachers are deceitful (v. 8 – “vain deceit”). Those who are spiritually careless and doctrinally “tolerant” are prime targets.

5. There are different types of false teachers. The false teachers described in Colossians 2 said godliness comes by external rituals (vv. 16, 21-23). Modern examples of this include the Roman Catholic Church, which teaches

righteousness through the sacraments, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which mixes law with grace.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-12

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. 8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: 9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

There are two spiritual programs described in this passage that are operating side-by-side in this present world. The mystery of iniquity is the devil's program to put the antichrist on the throne of the world (2 Thess. 2:3-7), but the Holy Spirit restrains and controls this (2 Thess. 2:6-7) while

He is fulfilling God's will in calling out a people for Christ's name among all nations.

These two streams have been working alongside one another throughout the Church Age. Since the days of the apostles there have been true churches and heretical churches. Apostasy has grown and developed, while at the same time the gospel has been preached and souls have been saved. In the nineteenth century, for example, there was an explosion of apostasy, with the origination of evolution, communism, cults such as Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses, theological liberalism, textual criticism, Unitarianism, and many other things, but at the same time there was a great ingathering of souls for the glory of God through the worldwide missionary enterprise and spiritual revivals.

A parallel passage is 1 John 2:18. "Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; by which we know that it is the last time." Here we see that there is a future antichrist, singular, and there are present antichrists, plural. The future antichrist is the demon-possessed man that will rule the world for a short time during Daniel's 70th Week. Present antichrists include every individual and organization that is operating under the devil's control to further his wicked purposes and to resist the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It includes cults that preach false christs and false gospels and false spirits (2 Corinthians 11:1-4), theological modernists, Hindu gurus, New Agers, Darwinian evolutionists, and many others.

The two parallel programs operated in the first century. Even as the apostles and prophets of God preached the truth and completed the canon of Scripture, the devil's emissaries were

busy undermining the truth with false gospels and false christes (e.g., 2 Corinthians 11:1-4). This pattern has continued throughout the Church Age.

Consider the last half of the 19th century. It was a time when apostasy exploded. Evolution and communism and humanism and psychology and spiritism and a multiplicity of cults were born. Unitarianism and theological modernism blossomed. But it was also a time when the gospel was being preached to the ends of the earth in an unprecedented missionary enterprise and massive evangelistic campaigns were headed by men such as D.L. Moody and Gypsy Smith. At the same time that Thomas Huxley, “Darwin’s bulldog,” was preaching agnostic skepticism to large crowds in London at his “Sunday Evenings for the People” lectures and selling his lectures to thousands, Charles Spurgeon was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to an estimated 10 million people and his sermons were multiplied far and wide.

In the first half of the 20th century, theological modernism made great progress and Pentecostalism was birthed, but Biblical fundamentalism was also born and multitudes of new Bible-believing churches were established, new Bible-believing denominations were formed, the Scofield Bible was published, many excellent Bible commentaries appeared, theologically conservative Bible colleges were built, and the gospel was preached to the ends of the earth.

1 Timothy 1:3-11

“As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather

than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. 5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: 6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; 7 Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. 8 But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; 9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; 11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.”

1. Apostolic teaching is the standard of truth (v. 3). Timothy was to test every doctrine against that which he had learned from Paul and was not to allow any variation from this standard.
2. Churches are to be very strict about doctrine (“no other doctrine,” v. 3). Doctrinal “broadmindedness” is not the path of true Christianity.
3. Preachers must deal with false teaching and not ignore it. Timothy was to charge those who were teaching error (v. 3).
4. False teachers have a heart problem (vv. 5-6). Heresy is not a problem of the intellect; it is a problem of the heart and the will. In John 7:17 and 8:31-32 Christ said men can know the truth if they continue in His Word and walk in obedience.

5. Again we see that there are different types of false teachers.

Some teach fables (1 Tim. 1:4). A modern example is Rome with its many fables, such as Mary the Queen of Heaven, the papacy, purgatory, and the saints.

Some deal in genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4). A modern example is the Mormons, who use genealogies for their baptism of the dead.

Some misuse the law (1 Tim. 1:7). These false teachers made the law a means to salvation; whereas the right use of the law is to reveal sin and lead the sinner to Christ (v. 8-10). This is the only true gospel (v. 11). The Seventh-day Adventists commit this error, teaching that law and grace work together for salvation.

Some teach false things about marriage (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Rome's doctrine of celibacy is an example.

Some teach false things about dietary matters (1 Tim. 4:3-5). They claim that there is a special Christian diet. Rome's commandment not to eat meat on Friday is an example of this. The Seventh-day Adventist dietary program is another example.

Some teach false doctrine about science (1 Tim. 6:20-21). An example is theological modernism that uses science to cast doubt upon the Bible, denying, that the world was created in six days, denying the universal Flood, and claiming that Moses didn't write the Pentateuch. Their authority is "science." I met a German pastor in Nepal in the 1980s who told me that Jonah wasn't swallowed by a whale.

6. Teaching produces fruit (1 Tim. 1:4). Truth produces godliness, edification, faith, hope. Error produces unanswered questions, confusion, doubt.

1 Timothy 4:1-6

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. 6 If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.”

1. The Holy Spirit prophesies of the apostasy (v. 1), which means to depart from the faith. The Bible never prophesies of a great revival of truth at the end of the age, but it frequently warns of apostasy.

2. That this will be a big problem is seen in the fact that the Holy Spirit speaks it “expressly.” This means to speak out plainly, boldly, forcefully

3. We have an absolute standard by which to test teaching (“the faith,” v. 1). The New Testament faith was given by the Holy Spirit through chosen men (2 Pet. 1:21).

4. False teaching originates with devils (v. 1). This is why there is such a powerful attraction to error and why so many people are deceived. The problem is not intellectual; it is spiritual.

5. False teachers are deceitful (“seducing spirits,” v. 1, “speaking lies,” v. 2). They follow the ways of their father the devil, who deceived Eve. The Bible oftentimes emphasizes the deceitfulness of false teachers: “deceitful workers” (2 Cor. 11:13), “came in privily” (Gal. 2:4), “cunning craftiness” (Eph. 4:14), “creep into houses” (2 Tim. 3:6), “deceiving” (2 Tim. 3:13), “feigned words” (2 Pet. 2:2), “deceivers” 2 John 13), “crept in unawares” (Jude 4).

6. False teachers have a seared conscience (v. 2). There is something wrong with the false teacher’s heart; he has willfully rejected the truth. Compare Titus 3:10-11. The conscience is delicate and if it is ignored it will become hardened.

7. Again we see that there are different kinds of false teaching. The particular false teachers described in 1 Timothy 4 forbade marriage and meats (v. 3). They taught that holiness is through abstinence. Two modern examples are the Roman Catholic Church with its laws of celibacy and its laws against meat eating on Friday (which were in force for many centuries), and the Seventh-day Adventists, with their dietary laws. The believer’s meals are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. The Word of God sanctifies the meal by inviting us to eat in good faith (Acts 10:15). Prayer sanctifies the meal by honoring God through offering Him thanksgiving. God wants us to recognize Him as the source of our blessings.

8. Good ministers warn and protect from error (v. 6).

1 Timothy 6:3-5

“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.”

In this passage Paul again refers to the false teachers who already existed in that time.

These particular false teachers corrupted the doctrine according to godliness. They argued against the plain teaching of Scripture that demands that the believer walk in holiness and obedience. We are saved by grace without works, but we are saved *unto* good works (Eph. 2:8-10). The believer is not under the Law of Moses with its eternal curses, but he is “under law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

These false teachers have multiplied at the end of the age. They have redefined “grace” so that it has become license. They claim that it is illegitimate to make any sort of dress standards or music standards or standards for entertainment. They love the sensual pop culture. But the true grace of God is described in Titus 2:11-14. It teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.

2 Timothy 3:1 – 4:6

2 Timothy 3:1-17 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of

their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. 6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, 7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. 9 But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was. 10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, 11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

2 Timothy 4:1-6 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. 6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

1. This cardinal passage on apostasy is a description of end-time Christianity. Paul is not describing the world; he is describing professing Christians. 2 Timothy 3:5 tells us that this passage refers to those who have a “form of godliness.”

Note the characteristics of the apostasy:

a. Apostates focus on self (“lovers of their own selves,” 2 Tim. 3:2).

This is a major characteristic of modern society. It is all about me. My music, my fashion, my space, my way. The pop culture promotes it and the Internet facilitates it. The 2006 *Time* magazine Person of the Year was YOU. That issue of the magazine had a piece of reflective Mylar on the cover in which you could see your own image. In 2007, Jean Twenge in *Generation Me* said that students today are more narcissistic and self-centered.

The worship of self is also evident in modern Christianity. Some examples of this are as follows:

Self-esteem theology (i.e., Robert Schuller's *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation* -- "Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem.")

Self-esteem psychology (i.e., James Dobson, whose chief objective is to "point the pathway toward greater self-esteem and acceptance.")

Man-centered gospels (i.e., the church growth movement that focuses on the "felt needs" of man rather than the glory of God and strict obedience to the Bible. When Troy Perry founded the homosexual-oriented Metropolitan Community Churches in 1968, his first sermon was entitled "Be True to You," from a line in Shakespeare's play Hamlet, "This above all: To thine own self be true.")

Man-centered music (i.e., Contemporary Christian Music, in which a large percentage of the songs are man centered; they are about my feelings, my problems, my needs)

b. Apostates live worldly lives (2 Tim. 3:2-4). This is true for a large portion of Christianity today. There is little or no separation from the world. There is no difference between the way professing Christians live and the way the world lives. They watch the same ungodly movies and television programs; they are crazy about the same vain professional sport teams; they dress in the same immodest manner; they love the same sensual music, etc. Many professing Christians support abortion, homosexuality, recreational drug usage, the use of profanity, and other such evils.

c. Apostates have professions and rituals but deny the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5).

The power of godliness is the gospel (Rom. 1:16) and the divinely-inspired Scriptures (Heb. 4:12).

At a large ecumenical conference in St. Louis in 2000, I asked many attendees the question, “When were you born again?” Most did not have a biblical answer. Some said they were born again when they were baptized. Others said they were born again when they had a charismatic experience such as speaking in tongues.

At another large ecumenical conference in 1987, half of the 40,000 or so people raised their hands one evening during the invitation, indicating that they were not sure of their eternal destiny. When asked why they didn’t try to clarify the confusion about the gospel, the conference leaders said, “We don’t have time for that.” (See “Strange Things in New Orleans: An Eye-Witness Report on the North American Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelism” at the Way of Life web site -- www.wayoflife.org.)

d. Apostates are given to adultery (2 Tim. 3:6).

This is true of the modernistic Protestant denominations that are associated with the World Council of Churches. Many of the fathers of theological modernism, including Paul Tillich and Emil Brunner, were adulterers. Some of the modernistic denominations have even used pornography in their training! For example, in 1988 the United Methodist communications agency issued a statement on “erotica” which approved of sexually explicit pornography as long as it was not violent or coercive.

Adultery is rampant within the Charismatic movement. Jim Bakker committed adultery with his secretary and paid \$250,000 in hush money. Jimmy Swaggart was twice caught

visiting prostitutes. Earl and Don Paulk committed adultery with female church members. Clarence McClendon fathered a child out of wedlock and married the woman one week after he divorced his wife. Todd Bentley committed adultery with a female employee and then divorced his wife to marry her. (See “Recent Pentecostal Scandals” at the Way of Life web site.)

Adultery is also rampant within Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). Just a few of the divorced or adulterous CCM musicians are Sandi Patty, Deniece Williams, Sheila Walsh, Randy Stonehill, Larry Norman, Tom Howard, Kevin Prosch, Ralph Carmichael, Steve Archer, Amy Grant, Gary Chapman, Stacy Jones of the rap group Grits, Melody Green, Ja’Marc Davis of Raze, and members of the now disbanded Barnabas.

e. Apostates target sensual women (2 Tim. 3:6).

The modernistic Protestant denominations have many women pastors and have more women members than men. There are more women than men in their seminaries.

Pentecostalism has always been attractive to women, and women were at the forefront of its inception. One of the most influential Pentecostal denominations, the Four Square, was founded by a woman, Aimee Semple McPherson, and she was immoral.

The cults appeal to and target women. Some cults were also founded by women; these include Christian Science and Seventh-day Adventism.

f. Apostates have education but no settled truth (2 Tim. 3:7). There is not settled truth even in regard to the gospel. In

1983, Robert Runcie, the head of the Anglican Church, told a London newspaper that as to the purpose of the cross he was an agnostic. I was once rebuked by an ecumenical preacher in Nepal because of my dogmatic doctrinal stance. He charged me with being proud because I would not entertain different interpretations. The reason they are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” is because they have rejected the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the sole authority for faith and practice. They unwisely seek for truth in the writings of the “church fathers” and in church councils and in visions and mystical experiences and the latest critical theories and in other places.

g. Apostates resist the truth (2 Tim. 3:8). The ecumenical crowd has only one enemy, and that is the “fundamentalist” or the “strict evangelical” who holds to the old paths.

h. Apostasy is associated with false miracles (2 Tim. 3:8). Jannes and Jambres performed minor miracles. The charismatic movement, with its bogus miracles, has permeated end-time Christianity.

i. Apostasy rejects biblical preaching (2 Tim. 4:2-3).

Willow Creek Community Church where Bill Hybels is senior pastor, says, “There is no fire & brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages.”

The rejection of biblical preaching is a theme that runs throughout Contemporary Christian Music: Steven Curtis Chapman: “I communicate in a way that is not abrasively preachy.” Morgan Cryar’s “songs deal with youth issues and situations without being preachy.” Randy Stonehill says: “I don’t want to preach at people.” Michael W. Smith says: “My songs are not preachy -- at all...” The Chinese CCM

group For You advertises their music as “spiritual but not preachy” (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, May 18, 2001).

Even among those who still believe in preaching, the character of the preaching is being toned down, with less forthrightness, less reproof, less rebuke. Warnings are given in generalities. The names of false teachers are rarely if ever named. The emphasis is positive and controversy is avoided.

j. Apostasy attracts heaps of compromising, apostate teachers who will tell the people what they like to hear (2 Tim. 4:3). When asked by the Sydney Morning Herald why his church had grown so large, Brian Houston of Hills Christian Life Centre said, “We are scratching people where they itch.” Indeed, people today itch for a type of Christianity that allows them to listen to whatever music they want and dress as they please and pursue wealth and pleasure and love the pop culture, and the contemporary churches are satisfying this itch.

k. Apostasy is sensual (2 Tim. 4:3). To live according to one’s own lusts is not New Testament Christianity. Paul taught us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit. 2:12). But apostates reject this path. They say, “No one is going to tell me how to live; I am free in Christ; I live by grace not works.” They slander “old-fashioned” Bible Christianity as “legalism and Phariseism.”

l. Apostasy follows fables (2 Tim. 4:4). When an individual rejects the truth, the devil blinds him with fables. The Roman Catholic Church has its fables pertaining to Mary, the papacy, purgatory, the saints, holy relics, holy water, etc. Theological modernism has its fables of two creation accounts, the JEDP theory, two Isaiahs, etc.

2. Apostasy will increase as the age progresses (2 Tim. 3:13). This verse describes the course of the Church Age. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see anything about a great revival of truth and righteousness at the end of this age, only increasing apostasy.

3. Apostasy is an issue of the heart and will (“they shall turn away their ears,” 2 Tim. 4:4). Apostasy is not an ignorance problem, and it is not an intellect problem.

4. Spiritual victory is promised even in the midst of apostasy (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 4:1-2).

Victory comes through apostolic faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:14). The apostles are the Standard.

Victory comes through supernatural salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Victory is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A major reason apostasy succeeds is because the new birth is not preached and required for church membership. The churches become leavened with unregenerate preachers and members who do not have spiritual discernment or power.

Victory comes through the infallible Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The victory over apostasy is to stand unmovable in the Word of God as the divinely-inspired Word of God, verbally and plenarily. Where the Bible is truly the sole authority for faith and practice and every teaching is carefully compared to the Scriptures, error cannot enter.

Victory comes through the judgment seat of Christ (2 Tim. 4:1). We have victory over apostasy when we keep in mind the fact that we must give account for our lives and doctrine. This motivates the believer to stay in the old paths when he is tempted to follow something new.

Victory comes through the preaching of God's Word (2 Tim. 4:2). We have victory over apostasy through the Spirit-filled preaching of God's Word, preaching that includes plain reproof and rebuke as well as exhortation and teaching.

Titus 1:9-16

“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. 10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. 12 One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. 13 This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; 14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. 15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. 16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

1. One of the pastor's responsibilities is to deal with error (v. 9). In fact, this is part of his qualification. The man who is incapable of dealing with error or refuses to deal with it is not qualified to lead a church. This means that a great many pastors today are disqualified!

2. The preacher does this work by knowing the truth (v. 9). He is a man who has been trained in the truth and who holds

fast to that which he was taught. This is not talking about seminary training, though I am not opposed to Bible Colleges and Seminaries that are operated by the Lord's churches. But Paul didn't start a seminary; the training mentioned here is solid Bible training given by God-called ministers as described in 2 Timothy 2:2.

3. We again see that there were already many false teachers in the early churches (v. 10).

4. False teachers cannot be ignored (v. 11), because they are harmful and they injure the faith of those who heed their teaching.

5. False teachers have carnal motives (v. 11).

6. Sometimes sharp rebukes are necessary to keep God's people in the truth (v. 13). This depends on their character. Like children, church members are different from one another and they must be dealt with differently. Some obey quickly, while others are more stubborn and lazy. This is also true for entire congregations and even entire people groups. Paul testified that the people of Crete were not quick to obey and had to be dealt with firmly.

7. True salvation produces a new life (vv. 15-16). Profession without possession isn't genuine salvation (2 Cor. 5:17).

2 Peter 2

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious

ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. 4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; 7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: 8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) 9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: 10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. 11 Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. 12 But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; 13 And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; 14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart

they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: 15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. 17 These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. 18 For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. 20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. 21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. 22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

This is another lengthy New Testament passage on the apostasy. Here Peter dedicates an entire chapter of his second epistle to this theme. In fact, as we will see, the theme continued through half of the next chapter. This reminds us of how serious the issue of apostasy is and how much it should be emphasized in the churches.

1. Some false doctrines and heresies are “damnable” (v. 1).

There are different categories of heresy, with some being more serious than others. There are heresies pertaining to the Lord's Supper and the various positions of authority in this world (1 Cor. 11:19), which are examples of types of heresies that can be held by a saved person.

"Damnable heresies" refer to false doctrines that result in eternal damnation. Those who follow damnable doctrines are not saved.

The example of a damnable heresy that Peter gave in this context is to deny the Lord. Thus, examples of damnable heresies are to reject Jesus' virgin birth, Divinity, eternal Sonship, Messiahship, miracles, sinlessness, and full humanity.

There was a great attack upon the doctrine of Christ beginning in Peter's day and growing in intensity over the next three centuries. For example, various Gnostics such as Ptolemy and Basilides, denied that Jesus was God. Marcion taught that Jesus was a type of phantom and not a real man. Valentinus taught that Jesus was born an ordinary man and became the Son of God at his baptism and ceased to be the Son of God at the crucifixion. Sabellius denied the Trinity. Arius denied that Jesus was eternal, claiming that he was a created being. (We have documented this in the book "Why We Hold to the King James Bible.")

This attack continues today through cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. According to Mormonism, Jesus was Elohim God's first spirit child and he is the brother of Satan, the second-born spirit child. Jesus was supposedly born into this world as a product of a physical union between Elohim God and Mary and through obedience, he "worked out his own salvation" and became a God. According to

Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus is not God but was created by Jehovah God. When he rose from the dead, he did not rise bodily but as a spirit person. Before he came to earth, he was Michael the Archangel, and after he rose from the dead, he was again Michael the Archangel. (We deal with these heresies in the Way of Life Advanced Bible Studies Series course "Defense of the Faith.")

The attack upon the Person of Christ also continues today through theological modernism, which began in Germany in the 19th century and spread through most denominations. For example, the Jesus Seminar, which was organized in 1985 and was composed of dozens of "experts in New Testament studies," determined that Christ spoke only 18% of the sayings attributed to Him in the Bible. According to the Jesus Seminar, Jesus did not walk on the water, did not feed the thousands with a few loaves and fishes, did not prophesy of His death or resurrection or second coming, did not conduct the Last Supper as it is recorded in Scripture, did not appear before the Jewish high priest or before Pilate, did not rise again bodily on the third day, and did not ascend to Heaven. According to the Jesus Seminar, "THE STORY OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS ENDED WITH HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS AND THE DECAY OF HIS BODY" (Religious News Service, March 6, 1995).

In 2 Peter 2, the apostle also mentioned the denial of the blood atonement of Christ as a damnable heresy (2 Peter 2:1). A modern example of this are the theological modernists and emerging church heretics who deny that Christ's blood is necessary for salvation.

Paul mentioned three areas of damnable doctrine in 2 Corinthians 11:4 -- another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel.

2. False teachers will be popular and successful (v. 2).

Indeed, in the 21st century the vast majority of professing Christians follow heretics of one sort or another.

3. This type of false teachers will live ungodly lives (“their pernicious ways,” v. 2). The Spirit of God associates them with adultery and with homosexuality (vv. 6, 14).

Consider the Roman Catholic popes and priests who have brought reproach upon Christ by their wicked lives. For example, Pope Urban VI (1378-89) “was a ferocious brute who had five of his enemies secretly murdered.” Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84) erected a house of prostitution in Rome. Pope Pius II (1458-64) wrote pornographic literature and had two illegitimate children. Pope Innocent VIII (1484-92) had at least two illegitimate children that he raised to positions of authority and wealth in the Catholic Church. Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) had at least four illegitimate children that he made rich through church appointments. One of them, Caesar Borgia, who was a cardinal, murdered his brother and brother-in-law. Alexander held unspeakable orgies in his palace and kept married women as mistresses. Pope Julius II (1503-13) had immoral relations with women that produced at least three illegitimate children. The Catholic monasteries and nunneries were filled with immorality. Even Rome’s “saints” spoke of this. Consider the following damning statement by Hildegard of Bingen: “But there are MANY to be found both among the spirituals and the seculars, who pollute themselves not only in fornicating with women, but even place on themselves the most heavy burden of

judgment, by contaminating themselves in perverse fornication. How? A man, who sins with another man according to the manner of women, sins bitterly against God and against that conjunction by which God joined man and woman” (*Scivias*, II, vision, 6, chapt. 78). When Luther visited Rome in the late 15th century, he expected to find a holy place; instead the city was full of mocking hypocrisy, defiant skepticism, jeering impiety, and shameless revelry. He commented, “If there be a hell, Rome is built over it.” (For documentation of these and other examples, see the book *Rome and the Bible*.)

The modernistic Protestant denominations are filled with adultery and homosexuality and other moral sins. The Episcopal Church in America has had two homosexual bishops. V. Gene Robinson, who was elected as bishop in 2003, broke his marriage vows in 1990 when he left his wife and young daughters and moved in with his male partner. Speaking at a homosexual rights event in Washington, D.C., in April 2000, Robinson said: “... we are worthy to hold our heads high as gay folk ... because God has proclaimed it so. That we are loved beyond our wildest imagining by A GOD WHO MADE US THE WAY WE ARE AND PROCLAIMED IT GOOD.” Modernists have supported moral relativity, the license to commit fornication in some situations, the right to view pornography, have abortions, and commit homosexuality, and many other evils. For example, in 1987, Episcopal churches in New Jersey published a report entitled “Changing Patterns of Sexuality.” It said “that by suppressing our sexuality and by condemning all sex which occurs outside of traditional marriage, the church has thereby obstructed a vitally important means for persons to know and celebrate their relatedness to God.” The report, which encouraged the churches to accept homosexuals,

fornicators, and adulterers as long as they are “sensitive, committed” people, was praised by Edmond Browning, the presiding bishop of the denomination. In 1991 Episcopal Bishop Spong published “Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality.” He said that some adulterous relationships are “marked by qualities of holiness” and urged “the blessing of gay or lesbian couples.” A 1993 survey found that 70% of Episcopalians believe “it is possible for sexually active homosexuals to be faithful Christians.” (See “The Denominations Today” at the Way of Life web site for other examples and documentation.)

There is an entire homosexual denomination called the Metropolitan Community Churches. They have 300 congregations in 22 countries and claim 43,000 members. The movement’s founder, Troy Perry, published a book entitled “The Lord Is My Shepherd, and He Knows I Am Gay.”

Pentecostals and Charismatics have also brought great reproach upon the truth by their adulteries and strange unbiblical ways. In recent decades Jim Bakker, head of the influential PTL television program, went to prison for defrauding his followers out of \$148 million. Bakker had committed adultery with church secretary Jessica Hahn and paid more than \$250,000 in an attempt to hush up the matter. Jimmy Swaggart, a leading Pentecostal preacher, was caught twice with prostitutes. Earl Paulk, founder of international Charismatic Bible Ministries, and his brother Don, were caught having sexual relationships with church members. Roberts Liardon, who has an international Pentecostal ministry, acknowledged in 2002 that he had “a homosexual relationship.” Pentecostal “prophet” Paul Cain admitted in 2004 that he was a homosexual and an alcoholic. Ted

Haggard, senior pastor of the 14,000-member New Life Church in Colorado Springs, resigned in 2006 due to homosexual activity. Pentecostal evangelist Todd Bentley admitted in 2008 that he had committed adultery. (See the book *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements* for more examples.)

4. The hypocrisy of the false teachers will bring reproach upon the truth (v. 2). How true this is! Throughout the world, “Christianity” has a bad name because of the lifestyle of false Christians.

5. The false teachers love money and teach people what they want to hear in order to get a following (v. 3). This is mentioned again in verse 14-16.

These false teachers do not serve God from a pure heart. They are in the business for money and prestige. This is why God requires that workers and preachers first be proven (1 Tim. 3:10). A man must prove that he is going to serve God properly *for nothing*, from his own free will, before he is given a position.

6. God’s judgment upon these false teachers will be severe (vv. 4-6).

God is a holy God, a God of truth. He hates unholiness and lies and will judge them with eternal judgment. Since God is eternal the judgment is eternal. The only safe refuge is in Jesus Christ. When a man rejects the God of the Bible, there is no hope for him.

The judgment is described in terms of “hell” (v. 4), “utterly perish” (v. 12), “mist of darkness” (v. 17), “forever” (v. 17).

We see that the Old Testament, though not the believer's Law, contains examples for us today (2 Pet. 2:6). Compare Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11.

7. These false teachers are proud, self-willed, presumptuous (v. 10). "Presumption" is to despise God's Word and to disobey it knowingly and brazenly (Num. 15:30-36).

8. The false teachers are not afraid to speak evil of dignities (2 Pet. 2:10).

Though they profess to love God, in reality they are rebels against God and His authority and His servants. The Bible says that civil authorities are God's servants, and they should be obeyed and honored (Rom. 13:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

The Roman Catholic Church exercised authority over the civil authorities in the "Dark Ages."

The modern Liberation Theology movement teaches rebellion against and even the overthrow of established authority through communist principles.

9. The false teachers pretend to be true believers (v. 13). They are wolves in sheep's clothing (Mat. 7:15). They are false apostles transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11:13).

10. The false teachers are beguiling (v. 14). They are like their father, the devil, who beguiled Eve in the Garden of Eden. He uses every type of flattery and trickery. This is why false teachers are so dangerous to the churches.

11. These false teachers are wells without water (v. 17). They do not preach the true gospel of salvation; they do not teach people how to know and please God.

12. The false teachers draw people by their great swelling words and the promise of moral license (v. 18). Many people are easily deceived by those who speak well and forcefully.

13. They entice “through the lusts of the flesh” (v. 18). Roman Catholic priests, for example, have taught people that they can live immorally and still go to Heaven as long as they participate in Rome’s sacraments. Wherever Roman Catholicism has held sway over the people, licentiousness is rampant. This can be seen in Italy, Ireland, Mexico, and the Philippines. The Christian rock philosophy teaches something similar. You can have Christ and the world, too.

14. True salvation produces a permanent change (vv. 20-22).

Those that turn back to the world permanently were never saved. Peter gives the example of the pig and the dog. You can clean up a pig and a dog, but the pig will return to the mire and the dog to its vomit because their nature has not been changed. No matter how well you clean these animals up and try to change them into something else, they will revert to their own nature as soon as they have liberty. Jesus said, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7), and, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). Biblical salvation is a supernatural conversion whereby the repentant believer receives new life, becomes indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and is adopted into God’s family. He can still sin, but when he sins the Holy Spirit convicts him and God chastises him, and he cannot remain comfortable in his sin as he was before he was converted.

A personal relationship with Christ is the protection against false teachers. The one who knows Him knows His voice (John 10:27-29). The thing I ask people who tell me that they are not sure they are saved is, “Do you know Christ personally?”

2 Peter 3:1-7

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: 2 That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: 3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: 7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”

In this passage Peter continues the warning about apostasy that he began in chapter 2.

1. Peter reminds the believers to take heed to the prophets and apostles (2 Pet. 3:1-2).

a. Reminders are necessary. A large percentage of what we hear in preaching and teaching is repetition, but it is important. We need repetition for education. We need it for

emphasis. We need it for remembrance, because we forget. Hebrews 2:1 warns that we can let the truth “slip.”

b. A “pure mind” is required for the reception of the truth (2 Pet. 3: 1). The mind is purified by faith in Christ and by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

c. The Bible is the absolute Standard that protects us from false teachers (2 Pet. 3: 2). Peter pointed his listeners to the authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Note that he puts the writings of the apostles on the same level of authority as that of the Old Testament prophets.

d. The prophets were “holy” (2 Pet. 3:2). This means they were chosen and set apart by God for the task of writing Scripture.

e. The apostles taught the same New Testament faith (2 Pet. 3:2). This refutes the error of “hyper-dispensation,” which claims that the gospel preached by Paul was different from the one preached by Peter.

f. The apostolic teaching is a “commandment” (2 Pet. 3:2). We are saved by grace without works, but we are saved *unto* good works (Eph. 2:8-10), and preaching obedience in Christian living by the power of the indwelling Christ is not “legalism.”

f. Christ is both Lord and Saviour (2 Pet. 3:2). Lord is mentioned first. No one can be saved who does not receive Christ as Lord. This means acknowledging Jesus as God and surrendering to Him as such.

2. Peter prophesies of scoffers in the last days (2 Pet. 3:3-6).

This 2000-year-old prophecy is amazing. It describes the thinking of men in the 21st century, reading like the morning newspaper!

The “last days” refers particularly to the end of the church age. It encompasses the Great Tribulation (Jer. 30:23-24), the regathering and regeneration of the nation Israel (Jos. 3:5), the second coming and glorious earthly reign of Christ (Isa. 2:2-5; Mic. 4:1-7), the resurrection (Jn. 11:25), and the final judgment of the unsaved (Jn. 12:48).

According to Peter’s prophecy, the 19th century marked the beginning of the “last days.” Prior to that it was generally believed even by scientists that God created the world and there was a universal flood. In 1930, Merson Davies wrote, “We should remember that, up to 100 years ago [1830], such a marked prejudice against the acceptance of belief in the Deluge did not exist.” In the 17th and 18th centuries Cambridge scholars still believed in a universal Flood, but by Darwin’s day they did not (Thomas Burnet’s *A Sacred Theory of the Earth*; John Woodward’s *An Essay Toward a Natural Theory of the Earth*; William Whiston’s *A New Theory of the Earth*).

a. We see the motive of these scoffers (“walk after their own lusts,” 2 Pet. 3:3). They are blinded by their love of sin and their desire to live as they please apart from God’s laws. This is what blinds them to the truth. They are in rebellion against the holy law-giving God of Creation. When the will of man surrenders to God the blindness is lifted (2 Cor. 3:14-16).

b. We see the ignorance of the scoffers (2 Pet. 3:5). They are willingly ignorant. It is interesting that the Spirit of God uses the term “ignorant” to describe these men, in that they are so proud of their learning! But they are ignorant of God’s Word

and of the fear of God, which is the very beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10).

Their ignorance is not a problem of the intellect or a lack of education; it is an act of the will. It is a willful rejection of the God of the Bible. Evolutionary geneticist Richard Lewontin said, “We have a prior commitment to materialism. ... Materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door” (“Billions and Billions of Demons,” *The New York Review*, Jan. 9, 1997, p. 31).

The will is the difference between a Ph.D. like Lowell Coker (Microbiology and Biochemistry, author of *Darwin's Design Dilemma*) who believes the Bible, and a Ph.D. like Richard Dawkins (author of *The Blind Watchmaker*) who doesn't. Both men look at the same evidence, but they come to completely different conclusions, because one man has submitted his will to God and the other hasn't.

c. We see the faith of the scoffers (2 Pet. 3:4).

They hold a naturalistic faith. They deny the supernatural. They deny Almighty God and His power. When verse 4 refers to “the beginning of creation,” this does not mean the scoffers believe in divine creation. It simply means that they believe in a beginning. Many evolutionists have used the term “creation” in this way. Ernst Haeckel, Darwin's greatest promoter in Germany, spoke of “the creation of the world” (Mario Di Gregorio, *From Here to Eternity*, p. 75). Roy Andrews, the colleague of Henry Osborn at the American Museum of Natural History, did this in the book *Meet Your Ancestors* (p. 10). Darwinian evolutionists believe the universe had a beginning in the Big Bang; they believe that it created itself. James Schombert, in his lectures on

astronomy at the University of Oregon, uses the term “creation” to refer to the Big Bang.

They have a uniformitarian faith, denying the global Flood.

We see that the worldwide flood is attested by the New Testament (2 Pet. 3:5-6). Both Christ (Mat. 24:37-39) and the apostles believed it. Peter describes both the creation and the Flood. The heavens and earth were created by God’s Word. Compare Genesis 1:1, 6, 9. In the beginning the earth was covered with water until God divided the water from the land (Gen. 1:1-2, 6-10). Thus the earth stood out of the water and in the water (2 Pet. 3:5). The world was overflowed with water (2 Pet. 3:6). The flood was worldwide.

d. We see the scoffers’ rejection of God’s Word (2 Pet. 3:5). The major object of the scoffer’s attack is the Bible. Since the nineteenth century the battle for the divine inspiration of the Bible has grown increasingly fierce and the skepticism has increased dramatically. This has been the focus of attack by theological modernism, Unitarianism, Humanism, Communism, the Cults, the New Age, and many other isms. Even many “evangelicals” who claim to be friends of the Bible have doubted its teachings, such as the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the six-day creation, and the worldwide Flood, as we have documented in “New Evangelicalism: Its History, Characteristics, and Fruit.”

e. We see the scoffers’ undeserved opportunity (2 Pet. 3:9). Christ died to make it possible for every man to be saved, even the most obstinate and foolish. Though the scoffers do not know it and though they ridicule it, Christ loves them and would save them if they repent. Notice that repentance is necessary for salvation. Jesus said, “... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). A man must repent of

his rebellion and surrender to God. Though the majority of scientists today do not believe, some have humbled themselves before God and received Christ as their Saviour. The book “In Six Days” edited by John Ashton contains the testimonies of 50 of Ph.D. scientists that believe in the literal six day creation account of Genesis.

f. We see the scoffers’ future if they persist in unbelief (2 Pet. 3:7-9).

God is a holy lawgiving God, a Judge who punishes sin, and every man who rejects the Salvation that He has provided in Jesus will suffer eternal punishment for his sin. Until men understand and accept this, they can never understand and appreciate God’s love and mercy in Jesus Christ. Until men know that they are lost, they will not flee to Christ for salvation. A man who thinks he is well does not go to a doctor.

The reason Christ is waiting for His return is that He wants to save sinners (2 Pet. 3:9). But from God’s perspective it has only been two days since Christ ascended to heaven (2 Pet. 3:8). When Jesus said, “I come quickly” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20), He was speaking from God’s perspective.

2 Peter 3:14-18

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. 15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are

unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. 17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. 18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”

In this passage Peter concludes the theme of apostasy that occupies the majority of his second Epistle.

1. Believers must be very cautious (vv. 14, 17).
2. False teachers wrest the Scriptures (v. 16). This means they do not use the Scriptures properly. They take things out of context. They interpret plain passages by those that are more obscure. They use the Old Testament to overthrow the testimony of the New. They force preconceived definitions upon Bible words instead of allowing the context to determine the meaning. They do not properly compare Scripture with Scripture.
3. Victory over error is through spiritual growth through the increasing knowledge of Jesus Christ and of His marvelous grace (v. 18).

1 John 2:18-29

“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. 20 But ye have an

unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. 21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. 23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. 24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. 26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. 27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. 28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. 29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.”

The apostle John continues the theme of apostasy, devoting a large part of his Epistles to this subject.

1. It has been the “last time” since the days of the apostles (v. 18). Peter used the term “last days” (2 Pet. 3:3) which refers more particularly to the end of the church age. The “last time,” on the other hand, refers to the entire church age and beyond.

2. There are two aspects to the doctrine of the antichrist:

There is a coming antichrist, singular. This refers to the Man of Sin who will rule the world during the Tribulation, as described in 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13.

There are present antichrists, plural. This refers to the spirit of error, the “mystery of iniquity” that is permeating the world in preparation for the coming of the antichrist singular.

3. Those who follow the antichrist spirit reject apostolic truth (v. 19) and teach error pertaining to the person of Jesus Christ (v. 22).

4. They seduce people (v. 26). Error cannot be ignored because it is aggressive and seductive. It must be dealt with “head on” as per the example of the apostles.

5. We see that victory over error is available and it is found in the following:

a. A close walk with the Lord by the power and instruction of the indwelling Spirit (v. 20)

b. Cleaving to apostolic doctrine in the Scriptures (v. 24)

1 John 4:1-6

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. 4 Ye are of God, little children, and have

overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. 5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”

1. Christians must be very careful and test everything by the Word of God.

2. There are many false spirits in the world. The danger of spiritual deception is very great.

3. There are different types of false teachers. The type described here by John does not confess that “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” This involves two things:

First, it is a denial that Jesus is the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament, that Jesus is everything foretold in Old Testament prophecy. He is God (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6). He is the Savior from sin (Isa. 53).

Second, it is a denial that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, meaning that Jesus is the incarnated God (John 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:16). Jesus is the eternal God. He had no beginning. He was not created. He did not become the Son of God at any certain point. He is God the Son from all eternity.

To summarize, to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh means to confess Jesus in every manner subscribed to Him in the Old and New Testament Scriptures: that He is both God and man, that He is eternal, that He is the Creator of all things, that He was born of a virgin, that He died for our sins, that He rose from the dead bodily, that He ascended up to Heaven bodily, that He is coming again bodily.

4. False teachers who are after the spirit of antichrist are of the world (v. 5). Rome is an example. Even secular authorities respect Rome. Observe how a secular magazine such as *Time*, which blasphemes Jesus Christ and casts doubt upon the Bible at every opportunity, often fawns over the Pope.

5. True believers follow the apostles (v. 6). Those who reject the authority of the Lord's apostles are not of God.

2 John 6-11

“And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. 9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

1. To deal with false doctrine is a mark of Christian love (v. 6). True Christian love is obedience to the Lord's commands (1 Jn. 5:3). Even the “apostle of love” preached frequently and plainly against error.

2. There are many false teachers (v. 7).

3. They are deceivers (v. 7), meaning they are tricky and are not what they claim or appear to be. Their error is often subtle. This is why they are so dangerous.

4. God commands the strictest separation from those who teach damnable doctrines and “fatal error” (v. 10). By this, we mean error that would corrupt the Christian faith, error that is so serious that one cannot be saved if he accepts it.

Jude 3-20

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. 4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. 5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. 6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. 7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. 8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. 9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord

rebuke thee. 10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. 11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. 12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; 13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. 14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, 15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. 16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. 17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. 19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. 20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost."

Jude devotes nearly his entire epistle to the theme of apostasy.

1. It is every believer's duty to contend for the faith (v. 3).

We are to do this "earnestly."

The basis for standing for the truth is "the faith once delivered to the saints."

What part of the faith are we to defend against error? All of it!

2. The apostles did a lot of "negative" preaching. This entire epistle is about error.

Revelation 2-3

Revelation 2:1-29 **Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. 8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things**

saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. 12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. 18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; 19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy

patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. 20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. 21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. 25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. 26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:1-22 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a

thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. 5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. 6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. 7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. 14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 15 I know thy works, that thou art

neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. 22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The subject of false teaching and apostasy comes up frequently in the Lord's messages to the seven churches.

1. False teaching was one of the major problems in the early churches. It was not the only problem, but it was a large problem.
2. Jesus judges churches on the basis of how they deal with false teachers (Rev. 2:2-3, 6, 14-15, 20-23). Church growth guru Rick Warren claims that God won't ask about our doctrinal beliefs, but this is heretical nonsense in light of the fact that doctrinal purity and dealing with false teachers is a major theme of the New Testament.

3. Jesus is pleased when churches deal with error (2:6). The church at Ephesus was commended for testing false teachers and for rejecting them. This is something that every individual believer and every church should emulate.

4. Observe that the church at Ephesus felt very strongly about this matter (Rev. 2:2-3, 6). They labeled the false teachers “liars” and hated their deeds, and this pleased the Lord.

5. Churches should deal with error even in times of persecution (Rev. 2:12-16). It is common for Christians to become careless about this. Richard Wurmbrand spent 14 years in prison in Romania and later founded The Voice of the Martyrs. I heard him speak in 1975 at Highland Park Baptist Church, and he said that we should not be so strict about doctrine when we are being persecuted because all “believers” need to encourage one another in such times.

Conclusion

1. False teaching is a great danger to the churches and to the individual believers.

2. The apostles spent a lot of time dealing with error; they named the names of false teachers and were very strong in their condemnation. They warned about a wide variety of false teachings.

3. Every preacher has a responsibility to deal with error (Acts 20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1).

4. Every believer has a responsibility to defend the truth against error (Jude 3).

Frank Viola and the Organic Church

There is some material that is repeated in this chapter from other sections of the book.

The “organic church” is a concept promoted by Frank Viola and his associates. Part of the larger house church movement, it has been called “church with little organization, little structure, and loose doctrine,” which is true and would be dangerous enough in itself; but there is far more to the organic church than that, and the “far more” is insidious.

A major principle of the organic church is that every member has equal authority and there is no office of pastor or elder. It is defined as “Spirit-led, open-participatory meetings and nonhierarchical leadership” (Viola, *Pagan Christianity*). Each member, male or female, is encouraged to contribute to the services as “the Spirit moves.”

Viola has promoted the organic church in popular books such as *Jesus Manifesto* (2010, co-authored with Leonard Sweet), *Pagan Christianity* (2002 and 2008, co-authored with George Barna), *Reimagining Church* (2008), *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church*, *Revise Us Again*, *Finding Organic Church*, *Rethinking the Wineskin*, and *So You Want to Start a House Church*.

Having become increasingly aware of the growth and influence of “the organic church,” I read the first three of these books as research for this report, in addition to extensive online investigations.

The organic church claims to be geared toward putting God’s people under the headship of Christ, but in reality it woos

them out from under the protection of God-called leaders, affiliates them with bogus “apostles” and “prophets,” and thrusts them unwittingly into the treacherous waters of end-time apostasy.

Why Organic Church Is Spreading

There are many reasons why the organic church in particular and the “house church” concept in general are spreading.

One reason is apostasy and compromise. A second reason why the organic church concept is growing is the abuse of pastoral authority. A third reason is the “me” generation’s rebellion toward authority. A fourth reason for the growth of the house church movement is the lack of education in so many churches.

We have dealt with these issues in the chapter “Motivations for the House Church Movement.”

A Challenge

Some things about the organic church *COULD* be a challenge to a New Testament church, though that is not what the organic church is intended to be.

We have dealt with some of these things in the chapter “The Challenge of the House Church Movement.”

An Attack

I want to hasten to say that the organic church is not intended to be a challenge and help to a “traditional” Bible-believing church in any sense. Its object is not to help *revive* churches but to *replace* them. The organic church’s criticism of Bible-

believing churches is not intended to be constructive. John Beardsley rightly observes that the organic church's criticism of churches is "propaganda to mislead the reader for another agenda" ("Doctrines of Devils and Men," Aug. 30, 2011).

In fact, the organic church is a vicious attack upon every Bible-believing church. It is an attack upon the office of pastor/elder, an attack upon owning a building, an attack upon having a church larger than 20 or 30, an attack upon preaching, an attack upon having the Lord's Supper less often than weekly and as a "ritual" as opposed to a full-blown meal, an attack upon restricting the woman's ministry, and many other things.

Frank Viola makes no secret of the fact that he wants to encourage people to leave "traditional" Bible churches.

Consider some statements from his writings:

"We are making an outrageous proposal: that the church in its contemporary, institutional form has neither a biblical nor a historical right to function as it does" (*Pagan Christianity*, location 110).

"Let's suppose the authors of this book attend your church service. And let's suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ puts something on our hearts to share with the rest of His body. Would we have the freedom to do so spontaneously? Would everyone else have the freedom to do it? If not, then we would question whether your church service is under Christ's headship" (*Pagan Christianity*).

According to Viola, if your church has appointed leaders who wield authority and who would not allow anyone to speak out at any time, then your church is unscriptural and should not exist.

Consider Viola's description of one of his "organic church" services:

“A Christian sister began the meeting by starting a song. And everyone sang with her ... a sister stood up and began sharing. ... two other sisters interrupted her and shared insights out of their own experience ... a brother stood up to speak ... He spoke for several minutes, and then a sister stood up and began adding to what he had shared. ... no one was leading this gathering” (*Reimagining Church*, pp. 69, 70).

Viola is wrong in claiming that no one was leading this gathering. In fact, the gathering was obviously being led by the most forward, outspoken women!

And Viola is hypocritical in his claim that a church must allow anyone to speak out. As we will see, he hates dispensational theology and separatism, and if a dispensational fundamentalist were to attend one of the organic churches that is under his “apostleship” and try to speak out on the imminency of Christ’s return and the necessity to win souls before it is too late and to urge the people to separate from every form of end-time apostasy, such an individual would soon be shut down!

Viola’s organic church principle makes much of 1 Corinthians 14:26 -- “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”

Let’s consider the context of this verse, which is the first principle of sound Bible interpretation. Paul was not saying that this is to be the standard pattern for every church service in every congregation throughout the age; he was simply stating that this was the pattern for the services AT CARNAL CORINTH WHERE SPIRITUAL GIFTS WERE BEING ABUSED.

Paul was not writing to encourage them to continue what they were doing; he was writing to correct what they were doing! He didn't say, "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together LET EVERY ONE OF YOU HAVE a psalm, have a doctrine..." He didn't write this as a commandment. Rather, he simply described what they were doing in the context of correcting it. He corrected their practice by limiting tongues speaking in two ways (verses 27-28) and by restricting both tongues speaking and prophesying to men only (verses 34-35).

Paul further stated in the same context that both tongues speaking and prophesying were temporary gifts that would vanish away (1 Cor. 13:8). The book of Acts tells us that this happened even before the death of the apostles. Tongues speaking is only mentioned three times in Acts: on Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4), at the conversion of Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10:46), and at the baptism of Apollos' disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:6). That's it for tongues! About A.D. 58 is the last time tongues speaking is mentioned in the divinely-inspired history of the early churches.

It was about that time that Paul wrote his first epistle to the church at Corinth to correct their abuse of the spiritual gifts. Tongues aren't mentioned in any other New Testament epistle. Paul explained that tongues speaking was a sign to the unbelieving Jewish nation that God was doing a new thing (1 Cor. 14:20-22). The tongues were a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 28:11-12, where the prophet said that though God would speak to Israel in other tongues, they would *not* hear. This is exactly what happened. With the establishment of the first churches and the destruction of the Jewish Temple, the need for the sign was finished and church history tells that both tongues speaking and prophesying (in

the sense of imparting new revelation) vanished except among heretical cults. Tongues ceased because their function as a sign to Israel was no longer needed, and prophesying ceased because the canon of Scripture was completed and the only type of prophesying that is needed now is the proclamation of Scripture.

We have testimony times in our churches, when the men are encouraged to share things with the congregation. We also allow the women to give testimonies in some services and to share prayer requests as long as they don't teach. But none of this replaces the authoritative preaching and teaching of God's Word by the pastors and other ministry-gifted men, which is specifically commanded in Scripture (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Titus 2:15; 1 Peter 4:11).

An Attack upon the Pastorate

The organic church is preeminently an attack upon and rebellion against the office of pastor/elder.

Consider the following quotes from Frank Viola's writings:

"The pastor is an obstacle to every-member functioning" (Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*).

"There is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that supports the existence of the modern-day pastor" (*Pagan Christianity*).

"Pastor is not an office or a title" (*Pagan Christianity*).

"Up until the second century, the church had no official leadership. ... The Christians themselves led the church under Christ's direct headship" (*Pagan Christianity*).

"In the first century, the laying on of hands merely meant the endorsement or affirmation of a function, not the installment into an office or the giving of special status" (*Pagan Christianity*).

“First-century elders were merely endorsed publicly by traveling apostolic workers as being those who cared for the church. Such acknowledgment was simply the recognition of a function. It did not confer special powers. Nor was it a permanent possession” (*Pagan Christianity*).

“We believe the pastoral office has stolen your right to function as a full member of Christ’s body” (*Pagan Christianity*).

“The one who plants a New Testament-styled church leaves that church without a pastor, elders, a music leader, a Bible facilitator, or a Bible teacher” (*Pagan Christianity*).

“Nowhere in the New Testament do we find grounds for a church meeting that is dominated or directed by a human being” (Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*, p. 53).

“First-century elders were simply spiritually mature men” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 171).

“... the New Testament knows nothing of an elder-ruled, elder-governed, or elder-directed church. And it knows even less about a pastor-led church. The first-century church was in the hands of the brotherhood and the sisterhood. Plain and simple” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 187).

“All in all, the New Testament knows nothing of an authoritative mode of leadership” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 198).

“... the Bible never teaches that God has given believers authority over other believers” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 214).

Viola goes to great lengths in his attempt to prove the previous statements, but in the process he twists Scripture out of context, abuses “the Greek,” and ignores the plain meaning of God’s Word in the most frightful, heretical manner.

The fact is that the terms “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” are used interchangeably in Scripture and refer to the same office in the New Testament church (1 Timothy 3:1). The terms emphasize three different aspects of the church leader’s ministry. As pastor, he is a shepherd; as elder, he is a mature example; as bishop, he is an overseer. The pastor/

elder is not merely a spiritually mature church member. He must meet certain specific qualifications (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and must be ordained (Titus 1:5). The apostle Paul set the pattern for this with the ordination of elders in the churches he started on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:21-23). And there is no hint that the elders were ordained as some sort of temporary function.

While elders are warned not to abuse their authority (e.g., 1 Peter 5:1-3; 3 John 9-11), they do have authority and will be held accountable to God for exercising it in a godly manner. The believers are to obey them that have the rule over them (Heb. 13:17), and that verse means exactly what the King James Bible says it means. The Greek word for “rule” here (*hegeomai*) is also translated “chief” (Acts 14:12), “governor” (Acts 7:10), and “esteem” (1 Thess. 5:13).

There are certain men in the churches with ruling authority, and the saints are to submit to them as long as they are leading according to God’s Word. Their authority is not their own opinion; their authority is God’s Word (Heb. 13:7). God’s people are to honor them that are “over you in the Lord” (1 Thes. 5:12-13). Obviously not every member has the same authority. Elders who “rule well” are to be given double honor (1 Timothy 5:17). Obviously elders are rulers.

These passages are unambiguous and totally refute the “organic church” premise and no amount of wolfish Scripture twisting will change this fact.

At the same time, self-willed men who exalt themselves and rule according to their own thinking rather than God’s Word and who are proud, demanding loyalty to themselves rather than to Christ and refusing to allow the people to prove all

things by God's Word, are not Scriptural pastors and are not qualified to lead God's people.

Frank Viola further says it is wrong for a church to support a pastor financially.

“... the clergy salary has no New Testament merit ... it runs against the grain of the entire New Covenant” (*Pagan Christianity*).

“Paul waived this right because he didn't want to burden any church financially while he served it” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 180).

In fact, God's people are instructed to give double honor to elders who rule well and the context makes it clear that this refers to money (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Paul taught that “the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). Paul received support from churches (e.g., Philippians 4:14-16). At times he refused to accept support, but this was not because it was wrong for a preacher to be financially supported; it was because in certain situations it would have been detrimental to the ministry to have received support (1 Cor. 9:15). Paul did urge the elders at Ephesus to work with their own hands (Acts 20:33-35), but this does not contradict what he wrote in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 and 1 Corinthians 9:14 and elsewhere. Pastors should not serve Christ for money and should guard against covetousness in their daily lives; they should always be ready to “work with their own hands” and to do whatever is necessary to further the gospel. I know many godly pastors who work a second job and live very frugally in order to carry on the ministry, and I know many godly pastors who are rightly recompensed “double” by flocks who are capable of doing so. Both of these scenarios are Scriptural.

The bottom line is that the office of pastor/elder is a biblical one and an essential one in the New Testament church and God's people should show great honor to those who are doing the work of God in a humble, godly manner.

The issue of prophets and apostles is an issue of charismatic heresy. There are no apostles today in the sense of men who wield authority over the churches as the Lord's apostles did in the first century. Those were men who had been individually appointed by Christ and had seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). They had miracle signs to authenticate their office (2 Cor. 12:12). Together with the prophets, those apostles laid the foundation of the church, completed the canon of Scripture, and when they died those offices ceased. The Bible tells us that there are only 12 apostles in this sense for ever (Rev. 21:14).

The Greek word "apostolos" is also used in a general sense to describe men who are messengers of the churches, and in this general sense there are "apostles" today. They are also called "missionaries, but they do not hold the office of a sign-gifted apostle and cannot be called the "apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). They have no authority over the churches beyond the congregations that they actually plant.

The charismatic "apostles" are self-deceived impostors who are building the end-time harlot church.

As for how many pastor/elders a church must have, the Bible nowhere says. It should therefore have as many as it needs and as many as the Lord calls. And as for how pastor/elders share authority when they are in the plural, that too is not spelled out in Scripture and is something that each church determines before the Lord and in light of its particular situation. Viola claims that "a senior pastor" is unscriptural,

but he cannot prove that. It is something the Bible is silent on, and the Bible's silence is not a law. In fact, a multi-headed body is a strange thing and in strictly practical terms it is more natural and reasonable that one man will have more authority than others.

Viola has no right to interfere with the business of churches by making laws where the Bible is silent.

An Attack on Preaching

The organic church is also an attack on preaching. This makes sense, as the organic church is an assault on authority in the church, and biblical preaching is an authoritative ministry. Consider the following quotes from Viola's writings:

"The Christian sermon was borrowed from the pagan pool of Greek culture" (Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*).

"The sermon preserves the unbiblical clergy mentality" (*Pagan Christianity*).

"The sermon often stalemates spiritual growth. Because it is a one-way affair, it encourages passivity" (*Pagan Christianity*).

"The Barna Group has shown that sermons are generally ineffective at facilitating worship, at drawing people closer to God, and at conveying life-changing information to those in the audience" (*Pagan Christianity*).

Mr. Viola and Mr. Barna are wrong. God has ordained authoritative preaching and teaching.

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

“These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15).

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

Speaking as the oracles of God refers to speaking with the very authority of God’s Word itself (Romans 3:2).

The organic church wants to replace authoritative preaching with non-authoritative “sharing.” A dogmatic “thus saith the Lord” is replaced with an anemic “it appears to me that this is the meaning, but what does the passage say to you?”

Along this same line, Viola and Barna claim that the pulpit itself is pagan, which is nonsense. The pulpit is simply a lectern for preaching and teaching. Viola and Barna complain that “the pulpit elevates the clergy to a position of prominence.” Maybe that is true in the Catholic Church, but it is not true in a Bible-believing church. In a Bible-believing church the pulpit does not exalt a man; it exalts the Word of God that the man is preaching. The preacher is to “reprove, rebuke, exhort” (2 Timothy 4:2). Preachers are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). Preachers are to “speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (Titus 2:15). The God-called preacher who is proclaiming the Bible faithfully is God’s mouthpiece, and it is wise to honor this position and activity in the house of God.

An Attack on Church Buildings

There is an entire chapter in *Pagan Christianity* on the supposed “error” of church buildings.

“The first churches consistently met in homes. Until the year 300 we know of no buildings first built as churches” (Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*, location 333).

“All the traditional reasons put forth for ‘needing’ a church building collapse under careful scrutiny” (*Pagan Christianity*, location 596).

“There does not exist a shred of biblical support for the church building” (*Pagan Christianity*, location 602).

While it is true that Rome’s doctrine of “sacred” church buildings and cathedrals is unscriptural, this does not mean that there is anything wrong with a church having its own building. Viola is again making a law from the Bible’s silence, which he has no authority to do. Nowhere does the Bible forbid a congregation to own property or to have its own building.

Even if it were true that churches didn’t have buildings before the third century, this means nothing. Further, it is an argument largely from silence since most of the record from the first two centuries has not survived. Prior to the reign of Constantine, churches were generally not welcome in the Roman Empire, and the believers were bitterly persecuted. Under such a circumstance it would not have been practical for churches to have their own buildings. During our first ten years as missionaries in Nepal, it was illegal to preach the gospel and to baptize, so churches had to operate underground without drawing attention to themselves. In those days, most churches met in rented houses and did not have their own buildings. After the laws changed in the 1990s and there was more freedom, churches began to purchase property. It was a simple matter of practicality.

The bottom line is that *nowhere* does the New Testament indicate that it is wrong for a church to rent or own a building. If a church needs a building, let it have a building. It’s none of the business of Frank Viola or George Barna or anyone else.

Where a church meets is irrelevant. It can meet in a home, a barn, a store front, or its own building. Oftentimes new churches start out in homes and then move to their own building as they grow. It's a simple matter of practicality, and to make a doctrine about buildings is to make laws beyond Scripture, which is true Phariseeism.

Viola and Barna also claim that the order of service itself is pagan. While an order of service *can* be a vain ritual, such as in Roman Catholic and some Protestant terms, an order of service itself is nothing but an order of service! We are commanded to do "all things decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). An order of service as such is a simple matter of practicality.

On the basis of the Bible's silence, Viola further condemns Sunday Schools, tithing, dressing up for church, altar calls, and other things, none of which are forbidden by the Bible.

Sheep Stealing and a Path to Control

In reality, the organic church is a sheep stealing movement. When a so-called organic church is started, it isn't usually started by winning the lost to Christ and discipling them by God-called preachers. An organic church is started by people who pull out of "traditional" churches and think they have the authority to be a church simply by meeting together with a few other people.

The organic church is more than a sheep stealing movement, though. It is a movement that is led by self-appointed "apostles."

Frank Viola calls for a "paradigm shift," which is a term used by emergents and New Agers to identify the type of dramatic

change they are trying to instigate. It refers to replacing something old and established with something new and different. Viola writes:

“To borrow a term from scientific philosopher Thomas Kuhn, we need a ‘paradigm shift’ regarding the church before we can properly rebuild it. ... in my personal judgment, the church doesn’t need renewal. It needs a complete overhaul. That is, the only way to fully renew the institutional church is TO WHOLLY DISASSEMBLE IT AND BUILD SOMETHING FAR DIFFERENT” (Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*, pp. 272, 276).

Here we see Viola’s true objective. To BUILD something requires BUILDERS. It requires LEADERSHIP and CONTROL. Something like this doesn’t just happen on its own “organically.”

At its heart, the organic church is not a “people’s movement”; it is a heretical “apostolic movement.”

Viola is part of a network of self-appointed apostles who are building the new paradigm. The organic church is just another plank in the large house of end-time apostasy.

“Every church in the first century had at its disposal an itinerant apostolic worker who helped navigate it through common problems. ... Present-day workers give similar guidelines to churches that are having difficulties in their meetings” (Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*, p. 65).

“I had just spent a year and a half ministering Jesus Christ to this group in biweekly ‘apostolic meetings.’ The goal of that ministry was to equip this new church where it could function on its own—without any human headship” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 69).

Integral to the organic church philosophy is the doctrine that there should be only one church in each town or city. And guess what “church” this will be? And guess who will be in control of this church!

“God’s people have splintered themselves into masses of disjointed, unconnected congregations all operating independently of one another ... During the New Testament era, each church was completely unified. All the believers in a specific locale lived as members of one family” (Viola, *Reimagining Church*, p. 129).

The existence of “masses of disjointed, unconnected congregations” is both an issue of New Testament polity and a product of apostasy. Each church is supposed to be autonomous under its one head Jesus Christ. That’s what we see in Scripture. Thus, the fact that churches are “disjointed and unconnected” in polity is not a matter of concern; it is what the Bible demands.

Further, churches are instructed to hold to and contend for the one New Testament faith (Jude 3). They are to “allow no other doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3), and they are warned that apostasy will explode at the end of the age, and this requires that Bible-believing churches be “disjointed” in fellowship from the majority of churches that are moving with the apostasy. Again, this “separatism” on the basis of doctrine is not a matter of concern; it is faithfulness to God’s Word.

Further, it was not true even in the earliest days of the churches that “all the believers in a specific locale lived as members of one family.” This statement ignores the fact that there were many false teachers and heretical sects even in the days of the apostles. They are mentioned and reprovved in passages such as Acts 20; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 11; Galatians 1; Philippians 3; Colossians 2; 1 Timothy 1, 4 and 6; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2; 1 John 4; 2 John; Jude; and Revelation 2-3. Some denied Christ’s deity; some denied the resurrection; some denied the doctrine of godliness; some preached a false gospel, a false christ, or a false spirit; some

abused the law. Some corrupted the Word of God (2 Cor. 2:17) and wrested the Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16).

This tells us that professing believers were far from united in the first century. Paul and Peter and John specifically warned the brethren to mark and avoid those who taught heresies. That means that they were to stay away from them. They were to be “disjointed and unconnected” from them! Paul even warned about many of the leaders of these sects by name (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17-18).

Since that was true in the first century, how much more will it be true today in the midst of the apostasy predicted for the end of the age! Paul warned that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). This describes the course of the church age in terms of the growth of apostasy.

Only heretics and ecumenists who want to create an unscriptural unity fret about “disjointed, unconnected congregations” more than about heresy and apostasy.

A Bridge to End-time Apostasy

The effect of the organic church movement is to stir up dissatisfaction with “traditional” New Testament churches and to lead people into the treacherous waters of apostasy. There is no solid commitment to sound Bible doctrine, no protection from God-called pastors, just the vague “oversight” of mystical “apostles” who are actually wolves in sheep’s clothing.

The waters of the organic church are treacherous indeed.

In just one of his books -- *Jesus Manifesto* -- Viola introduces his readers to a virtual who's who of ancient and end-time heretics: Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, Origen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Henry Newman, Søren Kierkegaard, G.K. Chesterton, Thomas à Kempis, E. Stanley Jones, Roger Schutz (founder of Taizé), the "Cappadocian Fathers," Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Reinhold Niebuhr, to mention a few. All of these are quoted favorably without a hint of warning about their rank heresies.

Consider some of the heresies that we find in Frank Viola's own ministry and writings:

A Neo-orthodox View of the Bible

It is no accident that Frank Viola frequently quotes Neo-orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth (who Viola calls "one of the greatest theologians of this century"), Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Consider some statements about the Bible from Viola's writings:

"Chapters 1 and 2 [of Genesis] were never intended to be the battleground for the Creation-versus-evolution debate" (Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 9).

"[The Bible] does not offer a plan or a blueprint for living" (*The Jesus Manifesto*, p. 137).

"The Christian religion teaches that the Bible answers virtually every question that's brought to the sacred text. The problem with this line of thought is that the true God cannot fit into anyone's box" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 130).

"Truth is not a book ... or a creed ... Truth is a person. And Jesus is His name. Christianity, therefore, is not fundamentally about following a book" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 137).

"[The Bible] speaks anew to every age. It should be read in the light of new information and fresh discoveries. It must also be

understood in community, not as an individual. ... Each age draws new insights from the Scriptures based on what that age brings to it. This means that revelation is always veiled in mystery. We bring to it our culture, our history, our gaze, and our glasses. The fundamentalist idea that the text has only one meaning is of relatively recent invention" (*Jesus Manifesto*, pp. 139, 140).

"... the New Testament doesn't supply us with a detailed blueprint for church practice. It's a gross mistake, therefore, to try to tease out of the apostolic letters an inflexible code of church order that's as unalterable as the law of the Medes and Persians. Such a written code belongs to the other side of the cross" (Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*, p. 244).

"The meaning of Christianity does not come from allegiance to complex theological doctrines, but a passionate love for a way of living in the world that revolves around following Jesus..." ("A Magna Carta for Restoring the Supremacy of Jesus Christ a.k.a. A Jesus Manifesto for the 21st Century Church" by Sweet and Viola).

This is pure Neo-orthodox heresy, which claims that the Bible itself is not infallible, that only Jesus is infallible, and that revelation is given to the individual directly rather than mediated through Scripture. The Bible becomes the Word of God only as we experience it as the Word of God. This denies what the Bible says about itself, that it is propositionally the infallible Word of God (e.g., 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21). It also ignores the essential fact that we know nothing certain about Christ apart from the Bible. The Bible is not Jesus and it is not God and we don't worship it, but apart from the actual words of the Bible we are left with vain mysticism, and the ultimate authority ceases to be God's revelation of Himself in Scripture and instead becomes my intuition of the word of God.

Viola's Neo-orthodox heresy is evident in the following statement:

"The meaning of Christianity does not come from allegiance to complex theological doctrines, but a passionate love for a way

of living in the world that revolves around following Jesus..." ("A Magna Carta for Restoring the Supremacy of Jesus Christ a.k.a. A Jesus Manifesto for the 21st Century Church" by Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet).

To set up following Jesus over against allegiance to Bible doctrine is a very dangerous heresy. Apart from sound Bible doctrine, how do we know that we are following the right Jesus in the right way of "living"? This statement by Viola and Sweet is an out-and-out commitment to blind mysticism and is a recipe for spiritual delusion at the hands of the one who transforms himself into an angel of light and who walketh about seeking whom he may devour (2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Pet. 5:8).

Viola's Neo-orthodox mysticism and heretical view of Scripture is a fundamental, cardinal error that could easily lead the members of his "house churches" into the realm of the New Age, where Leonard Sweet dwells.

An Ill-defined Gospel

Viola talks a lot about the gospel but in the three books of his that I read he never defines the gospel in a scripturally-clear manner. In light of Paul's warnings about the danger of false gospels (2 Cor. 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9), this is a huge warning sign.

Viola says that it is insufficient to preach a "gospel that is centered on saving man's spirit/soul" (*Reimagining Church*, p. 137). He calls this a "man-centered gospel" and urges people to discard it (p. 149), but that is exactly the gospel that the New Testament emphasizes.

Viola says that "... there is no 'gospel' that is not a 'social gospel'" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 108), but this is patently false.

The gospel teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but that is the fruit of the gospel and not the gospel itself. Paul summarizes the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, and there is no “social gospel” in Paul’s definition.

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

In his writings, Viola does not emphasize the issue of sin which is such an emphatic part of the true gospel. “Christ died FOR OUR SINS...”

It is no wonder that Viola speaks highly of emergents such as Brian McLaren and counts them as friends rather than reproving them as heretics. McLaren says, “I don’t think we’ve got the gospel right yet” (“The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2004, p. 40). In the book *What Is the Emerging Church?* we document the great confusion and heresy that surrounds the subject of the very gospel itself within the emerging church, and Viola is part of this confusion.

A Radical Ecumenism and a Non-dogmatic View of Doctrine

The organic church preaches a radical ecumenism and its twin, which is a non-dogmatic view of doctrine. Consider the following statements:

“So, any church that welcomes some members of the body but rejects others is not fully receiving Christ” (Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 147).

“Though we have never discussed any of these issues, the two of us might disagree about many things--ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, economics, globalism, or politics. But in this book, we have sounded forth a united trumpet. We have

sought to present the vision that has captured our hearts and that we wish to impart to the body of Christ" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 172).

Thus, Viola counts "soteriology" or the doctrine of salvation as a non-essential. His "vision" does not include a clear, settled doctrine of soteriology, ecclesiology (the church), or eschatology (prophecy).

Viola says:

"... making doctrinal purity the basis for fellowship typically ends up splintering the body of Christ even further. ... it's fundamentally unbiblical and profoundly unchristian to go about scrutinizing our fellow brethren with a critical eye" (Viola, *Reimagining Church*, p. 126).

In fact, it is fundamentally biblical and profoundly Christian to obey God's command to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Paul fought against false doctrine in practically every epistle he wrote and he oftentimes warned about false teachers and compromisers by name.

Viola says:

"I have many friends who are pioneering in the emerging church. And I applaud much of what they are saying, especially in the area of upholding a 'generous orthodoxy' that emphasizes accepting all Christians whom God has received" (*Reimagining Church*, p. 265).

A Generous Orthodoxy is the title of one of Brian McLaren's books, and Viola is promoting the same unscriptural ecumenism. In fact, Viola includes *A Generous Orthodoxy* in his list of "Best 100 Christian Books Ever Written" at his blog. McLaren claims that we can't be sure if our doctrine is correct, so we should be generous rather than strict, but the Bible says we are to mark and avoid professing believers on the basis of doctrine (Romans 16:17); thus, it is obvious that we *can* "get it right."

“We have learned a lot from different perspectives on Jesus: feminist theology, creation theology, process theology, liberation theology, narrative theology, postliberal theology, emergent theology” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 109).

Here Viola lists a breathtaking number of heretical end-time theologies and instead of condemning them, he says “we have learned a lot” from them. And yet he is called “an evangelical”!

“As you continue to attend ‘First Presbycharisbaptist,’ you quickly discover that in order to be fully accepted by its members, you must hold to their view of spiritual gifts. You must also hold to their view of election and the second coming of Christ. ... If a group of Christians demands anything beyond a person’s acceptance of Christ before admitting that person into fellowship, then that group isn’t a church in the biblical sense of the word. It’s a sect” (*Reimagining Church*, pp. 118, 119).

“The historic Christian creeds are an expression of the need to answer Jesus’ ‘Who do you say that I am?’ But that ‘you say’ is contextual. Each new generation, in every culture, is given a ‘you say’” (*Jesus Manifesto*, location 215)

“... the church doesn’t need rules established, laws passed, or wolves shot” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 25).

The non-doctrinal “church” envisioned by Frank Viola is apostate. Scripture is given for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We are to preach doctrine (2 Timothy 4:2). We are to continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42). We are to allow no other doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3). We are to have one mind in the church (1 Cor. 1:10). We are to teach doctrine to faithful men who are to teach “the same” to others (2 Timothy 2:2). We are to mark and avoid them which teach contrary to apostolic doctrine (Romans 16:17). We are to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

In reality, Viola is hypocritical in that he *does* care about doctrine and does reject others on the basis of doctrine. He

cares about his doctrine of the organic church, writes book after book on this theme, judges every church by it, and divides believers on this basis.

Rejection of Pre-tribulationalism

Like his friends in every branch of the emerging church, Viola hates dispensationalism and despises the doctrine of the imminent Rapture of New Testament saints.

“John Nelson Darby ... raised proof texting to an art form. In fact, it was Darby who gave fundamentalist and evangelical Christians a good deal of their presently accepted teachings” (Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity*).

“Pretribulational dispensationalism gave rise to the idea that Christians must act quickly to save as many souls as possible before the world ends” (*Pagan Christianity*).

“Imagine a church where the members don’t know one another’s views on the rapture. Imagine a church where the members don’t know one another’s theories on the millennium--and really don’t care to know them” (*Reimagining Church*, p. 131).

Viola never misses a chance to take a pot shot at a literal interpretation of prophecy with its imminent Rapture and the urgency to preach the gospel while there is opportunity, because this gets in the way of the creation of his “new paradigm,” which is kingdom building.

A False Doctrine of Christian Liberty

Viola abuses “grace” and holds the Christian rock philosophy that replaces liberty with license. Note the following statements:

“I shall argue in this book, the New Testament contains no ... list of rules and regulations for Christians to follow” (Viola, *Reimagining Church*).

"Sadly, many of us today combat problems and erroneous teachings with laws, rules, religious duty--and the mother of all religious tools: guilt" (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 25).

"Christ nailed to His bloody cross every law, every rule, and every regulation that would condemn the beloved people of God" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 32).

"... a church that is filled with leader-oholics, justice-oholics, commandment-oholics, and doctrine-oholics ... For Paul, his apostolate was not to advance a defining array of doctrines or a checklist of propositions. ... Christianity is a relationship with Jesus the Christ. When things go wrong, it's not because we don't understand certain doctrines or fail to follow particular commands" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 39).

While salvation is a free gift of God's grace, salvation is *unto* good works (Eph. 2:8-10), and the New Testament is literally filled with laws, rules, and duties. The epistle to the Ephesians itself contains, by my count, 88 specific laws and duties in chapters 4-6. The believer does not obey the New Covenant by his own strength. He obeys through the power of the indwelling Christ, but that does not make the laws and duties of the New Testament any less real and binding. What Christ nailed to the cross was the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, with its curses. It was a ministration of condemnation and death because it demanded perfect righteousness from sinners who cannot provide it (2 Cor. 3:7-9). The Old Covenant has no power over the New Testament believer (Romans 7; Gal. 3:24-25), but Jesus commanded the churches to teach the disciples to observe *all* things that He has commanded, and this refers to the commandments in the New Covenant (Matthew 28:18-20). Paul instructed Timothy that he was responsible to keep the New Covenant commandments without spot (1 Timothy 6:13-14). The New Testament is a law of grace and liberty, because the curse of the Old Covenant has been taken away, but it is a law nonetheless and every commandment in the New Testament epistles is binding. The doctrines are also binding. Paul

instructed Timothy to allow “no other doctrine,” which is the very strictest concept of doctrinal purity (1 Tim. 1:3). In Revelation 2-3, when Christ addressed the seven churches, He condemned them for holding and countenancing false doctrine as well as for disobedience to particular commandments.

A Heretical Doctrine of Sanctification

“So why do we preach rules, regulations, and laws instead of Christ? And why such an emphasis on ‘works’? Good works are simply fruit falling off a tree” (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 58).

“A person who is living by the tree doesn’t sit back and say, ‘Let me try to do good and avoid evil.’ Instead, he allows the life of God to flow within and through him. He yields to the instincts, promptings, and energy of that God-life” (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 129).

The New Testament doesn’t preach rules *instead of* Christ; it preaches “rules” to show us the mind of Christ. Viola’s heretical doctrine of sanctification puts the professing believer into the driver’s seat and turns the liberty of Christ into license, because he feels that he is at liberty to follow his spiritual inclinations. If a believer tries to “yield to the instincts, promptings, and energy of the God-life” apart from defining the Spirit’s mind strictly according to Scripture, he becomes a mystic who moves according to his own interpretation of God’s will. As we will see, this is exactly what Viola promotes.

Good works in the believer’s life are indeed *the fruit* of abiding in Christ, but according to the New Testament’s instruction about sanctification good works are also *the means* of abiding in Christ (John 15:8-10)! Viola is preaching the heresy that there is one key to sanctification in Christian living. In his case it is the key of a mystical abiding

in Christ that is not clearly defined by and bound by Scripture, whereas the New Testament presents *a multiple approach* to sanctification. There are many aspects to spiritual victory and neither Christ nor the writers of the New Testament epistles ever present it as any one thing. It is not only resting or not only abiding or whatever, it is abiding *and* resting *and* yielding *and* obeying *and* avoiding *and* pursuing, etc.

If there were any one “key” to sanctification, we can be sure that the apostles and prophets would have described it in precise and clear terms to the oft-struggling first century churches and they would have emphasized it in the Pastoral Epistles to the preachers who were in the midst of the battle. But we look in vain for such a “key.” Consider Romans 6-8. Here Paul describes many things that are necessary for Christian growth and victory. We are to reckon ourselves dead with Christ and alive unto God (Rom. 6:11). We are to refuse to yield our bodies to unrighteousness (Rom. 6:13). We are to yield our bodies to righteousness (Rom. 6:13). We are to walk after the Spirit rather than the flesh (Rom. 8:4). We are to mortify the works of the flesh by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13).

Viola’s doctrine of sanctification through merely “abiding” is part of his mystical approach to Christianity, which is not doctrinaire or tightly prescribed by Scripture. It consists of a vaguely defined yielding “to the instincts, promptings, and energy of the God-life,” but when that is not strictly defined by the Bible it is pure mysticism. The professing believer actually becomes his own god even while professing to be submitted to Christ as Head.

Viola's doctrine of sanctification is also a heretical denial of the continuing reality of the "sin nature" in the Christian life. He says the believer is to "yield to the instincts, promptings, and energy of that God-life." This doctrine is true as far as it goes, but it fails to deal with the fact that there is an "old man" as well as a "new man" present in the Christian life, and the old man has its own instincts, promptings, and energy. Romans 6:16 instructs the believer to yield to obedience rather than to sin, which plainly implies that sin is still present and is giving its promptings and can be yielded to. In Ephesians 4:22-24 the believer is instructed to put off the old man and put on the new man, and this *process* is described as a necessary part of Christian growth. The "old man" or old nature is present in the believer and issues its evil promptings. As a believer, Paul testified that in his flesh dwelt no good thing (Rom. 7:18). John said that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8).

In the born again Christian life, there are holy promptings and there are sinful promptings. The particular danger is that the sinful promptings are wrapped in deception. The Bible says the "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). This wickedness and deception that is a part of our fallen nature is still a reality in the believer's life, because the old fallen heart is still present.

Thus, it is not true that the believer is free merely to yield to the instincts and promptings that come to him. Rather, he must carefully test those promptings by God's Word to see if they are right or wrong and he must continually reject the evil promptings.

Christian sanctification is not merely a matter of resting in the new man; it is spiritual warfare with the old man (2 Cor.

10:5). It is not merely floating along on the current of the new man in Christ; it is paddling upstream against the current of the old.

New Apostolic Pentecostal Heresy

Viola's commitment to mysticism is not surprising in light of his background in Pentecostalism and his continued close association with the most radical elements of the charismatic movement. He says,

"I used to belong to one of the largest Pentecostal churches in the state of Florida" (*Reimagining Church*, p. 111).

In the 1990s Viola attended the laughing-drunken-slaying "revivals" in Toronto, Pensacola, Lakeland, and Melbourne. In a 2006 article he said that he was glad that he went to the meetings and had nothing negative to say about them ("Slaughtering Sacred Cows: Part 3 The Felt-Presence of God," Present Testimony Ministry newsletter, April 2006, www.procinwarn.com/frankviola_april-2006.htm).

Viola praises John Wimber's "Third Wave" movement which integrated charismaticism with evangelicalism:

"The third-wave movement has contributed a number of helpful spiritual accents. Most significantly, it has fostered a genuine hunger for and openness to God's moving. It has produced a sound blending of evangelical and charismatic theology. And it has created a vast collection of wonderfully anointed praise and worship music" (*Reimagining Church*, p. 260).

The Third Wave's so-called "openness to God's moving" is blind charismatic mysticism not properly controlled by Scripture. It's so-called "sound blending" was the corruption of whatever biblical theology and practice previously existed in evangelicalism. And its supposed "anointed worship

music” is an illegitimate co-mingling of the holy Rock Christ and the unholy rock of the world.

Viola’s close association with radical charismaticism is evident in his relationship with House2House. Viola spoke at their conferences in 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2011. His book *Reimagining Church* is effusively recommended by Tony Dale, editor of House2House magazine. Contributors to the magazine include John Arnott who led the wild, drunken “revival” at the Toronto Christian Fellowship Church in Ontario.

Joining Viola at the 2011 House2House conference in Jacksonville, Florida, was Wolfgang Simson who is a promoter of extra-biblical revelation and the interpretation of dreams. He is a proponent of the heretical latter rain apostolic miracle revival with its dominionist objective of building the kingdom of God before Christ returns.

Other associates of Viola point to his involvement with and acceptance of the Latter Rain apostolic miracle revival. Heidi and Rolland Baker are examples.

“[The Bakers] flourish in the New Apostolic Reformation and can often be found on the Elijah List (chief organ for the NAR) and OpenHeaven.com (a radical Dominionist group). The Bakers spoke at the Global Awakening ‘Voice of the Apostles’ conference, October 28-31, 2009, along with other NAR apostles Randy Clark, Che Ann, Bill Johnson and John Arnott. Heidi was featured along with Latter Rain cult leader Rick Joyner at his MorningStar Ministries ‘Harvest Fest’ held September 24--30, 2009. The list of interconnections and associations with the NAR could go on and on” (Ken Silva, “The Other Side of Emergent: The New Apostolic Reformation,” *Apprising Ministries*, July 8, 2010).

These are incredibly dangerous spiritual waters, and the Bible asks “can two walk together except they be

agreed” (Amos 3:3)? The answer is no, they cannot. Men do not walk together unless they agree on fundamental things.

Regardless to what degree Frank Viola agrees with the Latter Rain apostolic miracle revival and its dominionist objective, it is evident that those who associate with Viola in his organic church movement can easily come into contact with this heresy and with the heretical “apostles and prophets” that promote it.

(For more about John Wimber, Rick Joyner, the Third Wave, and the Latter Rain see *The Directory of Contemporary Worship Musicians*, which is available as a free eBook at the Way of Life web site, under the entries on Lindell Cooley, Tim Hughes, Kevin Prosch, David Ruis, and John Wimber. See also *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements*, which is available in print and eBook formats from Way of Life - www.wayoflife.org.)

Full Reconciliation Already Made

Viola teaches the heresy that the universe has already been reconciled to God through Christ’s cross.

“And by that horrible death, He reconciled a fallen cosmos to God” (Viola and Sweet, *Jesus Manifesto*, p. 28).

“I [Jesus] made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of My blood on the cross” (*Jesus Manifesto*, location 2804).

In fact, though God’s *goal* is to reconcile all things, reconciliation will occur in stages, with the New Testament believer as the first fruits (Colossians 1:20-21).

At this time, the creation is most definitely *not* reconciled to God. Paul tells us that the whole creation still groans

together under God's curse (Romans 8:22). The cosmos will not be reconciled unto God until the current heaven and earth are replaced with a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10-13).

Unbelievers are not presently reconciled to God. They are invited to be reconciled through faith in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). But those who die in unbelief will never be reconciled to God but will endure eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

Roman Catholic Contemplative Mysticism

By his own admission, Frank Viola has been deeply involved with contemplative mysticism since the mid-1990s.

"In 1994, what came to be known as 'the Toronto Blessing' hit the United States. Rodney Howard-Browne held his first convention in the Carpenter's Home Church in Lakeland, Florida. That convention went on for weeks. From there, it quickly spread to other parts of North America: most notably Toronto, Canada; Melbourne, Florida; and Pensacola, Florida. Upon hearing about the new move of God in 1994, I traveled to Lakeland and sat in on those first meetings where 'the blessing' had just begun. The following year, I traveled to Melbourne, Florida and sat in a meeting officiated by Randy Clark when the phenomenon had spread there in full force. I will not share my observations of 'the blessing' in this article. But I'm glad I went to those meetings. ...

"One of my closest friends is a man named Frank Valdez. I met Frank in 1992. He is the wisest Christian I've ever met. ... Sometime in 1995, as we were sharing lunch together, I told Frank about my observations on 'the Toronto blessing.' This led into an invaluable discussion that marked a turning point in my life. Frank said to me, 'There is a Christian tradition that practices a form of prayer that employs no words. It's beyond speaking in tongues and deeper than the Toronto blessing.' He had my attention. As I quizzed him about his comment, Frank began to share with me about the contemplative prayer tradition. He spoke about centering prayer, *lectio divina*, and other ancient spiritual practices that were unfamiliar to me at the time. ... Frank introduced me to the Christian 'mystics.' ... Meister Eckhart was a 13th century German mystic who is

generally regarded as the fountainhead of 'Rhineland mysticism.' He taught that God was beyond all conceptualization. This conceptualization included the 'concept' of god itself. Meister pointed people to the 'God beyond god, i.e., the God who exceeds any concept we have of Him. ... Thomas Merton was very influenced by Eckhart. Merton added a social and historical dimension to Eckhart's critique of religion" ("Slaughtering Sacred Cows: Part 3 The Felt-Presence of God," Present Testimony Ministry newsletter, April 2006, http://procinwarn.com/frankviola_april-2006.htm).

Nothing could provide a more enlightening and frightful glimpse into Frank Viola's doctrine and philosophy of Christian living than this testimony. He is a mystic who has sought enlightenment through the most radical of Pentecostal nonsense (e.g., the Lakeland Outpouring with its Holy Ghost Bartender, Rodney Howard-Browne, dispensing uncontrollable laughter and spiritual drunkenness; the Toronto Blessing with its barking and roaring and crowing; the Brownsville Revival in Pensacola with its pathetic uncontrollable shakings and its pastor so "drunk" in the "spirit" that he has to be hauled out of church in a wheelbarrow). Viola doesn't tell us to what extent he agrees with these things, but the very fact that he would travel long distances to such places and his refusal to renounce them is evidence of his spiritual blindness and his commitment to a mysticism that is not bound by Scripture.

Yet Viola tells us that he has found an even more powerful form of mysticism in the contemplative movement, and he mentions two of the most radical and dangerous of the contemplative mystics: Meister Eckhart and Thomas Merton.

Eckhart was a German Dominican priest who taught complex gnostic and pagan doctrines. His theology was akin to Hinduism and Buddhism. He taught evolution and reincarnation. In his book *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, D.T. Suzuki compared Eckhart's teaching favorably with Zen Buddhism. Eckhart taught that God,

which he called “the absolute principle” and “the ground of the soul,” is “pure intellect and not being,” and that man at his highest level is one with God. Eckhart said that in every man there is divinity and spiritual wisdom. He called this “divine ground,” “divine spark,” “divine image,” “holy self,” and “inner light.”

Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic monk, was a universalist and a panentheist (God is in everything). He called himself a Buddhist and traveled to the coast of Sri Lanka to worship before Buddhist statues. The titles of his books include *Zen and the Birds of the Appetite* and *Mystics and the Zen Masters*. He said: “I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity. The future of Zen is in the West. I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can” (David Steindl-Rast, “Recollection of Thomas Merton’s Last Days in the West,” *Monastic Studies*, 7:10, 1969). Merton promoted a blind mystical communion with God that “is beyond words, beyond speech, beyond concept” (*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 1975 edition, p. 308). Any “god” that is beyond words, speech, and concept is not the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture. Merton was led by his contemplative mysticism to believe in the pagan heresies of universalism and the divinity of man. He said that if men were to realize who they are, they would bow down and worship one another.

(For more about Eckart and Merton, see *Contemplative Mysticism*, which is available in print and eBook editions from Way of Life.)

New Age Panentheism

Contemplative mysticism often leads the soul to the pagan doctrine of panentheism--the belief that God is in

everything--which denies the fall and the curse as defined biblically. Contemplative practitioners often become enamored with out-and-out New Agers.

Frank Viola's close association with Leonard Sweet (co-authoring *Jesus Manifesto*) points precisely in this direction.

Sweet is devoted to contemplative mysticism. He wrote:

"Mysticism, once cast to the sidelines of the Christian tradition, is now situated in postmodernist culture near the center. ... In the words of one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, Jesuit philosopher of religion/dogmatist Karl Rahner, 'The Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic, one who has experienced something, or he will be nothing'" (*Quantum Spirituality*, 1991, pp. 11, 76).

In light of this unhesitating recommendation of mysticism and of the Roman Catholic universalist/panentheist Karl Rahner, who was a bridge between Catholicism and Eastern religions, it is no wonder that Sweet is a New Age sympathizer if not an out-and-out New Ager. Sweet promotes a universalistic-tinged doctrine that he calls New Light and "quantum spirituality" and "the Christ consciousness." He describes it in terms of "the union of the human with the divine" which is the "center feature of all the world's religions" (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 235). He defines the New Light as "a structure of human becoming, a channeling of Christ energies through mindbody experience" (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 70). Sweet says that "New Light pastors" hold the doctrine of "embodiment of God in the very substance of creation" (p. 124). In *Carpe Mañana*, Sweet says that the earth is as much a part of the body of Christ as humans and that humanity and the earth constitute "a cosmic body of Christ" (p. 124). Sweet says that some of "New Light leaders" that have influenced his thinking are Matthew Fox, M. Scott Peck, Willis Harman, and Ken Wilber. These are

prominent New Agers who believe in the divinity of man, as we have documented in the book *The New Age Tower of Babel*.

(For more information on this see the following reports at www.wayoflife.org -- "Thomas Merton," "Beware of Leonard Sweet," "Contemplative Practices Are a Bridge to Paganism," "Contemplative Spirituality Dancing with Demons," "Contemplative Spirituality and the New Age," and "Silence vs. the Silence.")

Heresy Pertaining to Christ

Viola's contemplative mysticism is leading in the direction of false christs. He makes the following heretical statements:

"Paul's idea is not that the Head is somehow screwed onto the body. His idea is that Christ embodies the church. The risen Christ is a living, inclusive, 'more-than-individual' personality" (*From Eternity to Here*, pp. 266, 267).

"Jesus Christ cannot be separated from His church. While Jesus is distinct from His Bride, He is not separate from her. She is, in fact, His very own body in the earth" (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. 141).

On page 143 of the *Jesus Manifesto*, Viola favorably quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer saying the church is "Christ existing as community."

Viola Praises *The Shack*

In light of Viola's frightful heresies and his deep involvement with contemplative mysticism, it is no wonder that he endorses William Paul Young's *The Shack* and its non-judgmental father-mother god. Viola says,

"All told, I will shamelessly throw my hat in the ring with those who are giving unqualified praise for *The Shack*" (<http://>

frankviola.wordpress.com/2008/07/28/short-book-review-of-the-shack-by-william-p-young).

Every individual who loves *The Shack* god is an idolater.

See “The Shack’s Cool God” at the Way of Life web site.

Frank Viola and the Organic Church are very dangerous spiritual waters. Beware!

The Integrated Church and Vision Forum

(As with the previous chapter on Frank Viola and the Organic Church, there is some repetition in this chapter from material used in earlier parts of this book.)

We are writing about the Integrated Church Movement and Vision Forum in one chapter, because they are so closely tied together. While the Integrated Church Movement is larger than Vision Forum, Vision Forum is probably the most influential part of it.

The Integrated Church Movement (ICM), also called the Family Integrated Church, is defined as follows:

“The family-integrated model jettisons all age-graded ministries. Those who adhere to this model view each family unit (single or married, with or without children) as one ‘block’ that comprises the local church. That is, they view the church as a family of families. They view the church’s purpose as equipping the parents, primarily the fathers, to evangelize and disciple their children” (Terry Delany, “Three Perspectives on Family Ministry,” March 18, 2009).

It is not an organization but a philosophy, and there are many varieties of Family Integrated churches.

The Good

There are many biblically-sound things that are emphasized by the Integrated Church movement.

It emphasizes building godly families and it resists the cultural way of parents abdicating their responsibilities to government schools and church programs.

It urges fathers to take their rightful place as committed and involved leaders and instructors.

It emphasizes separation from the world's philosophies and ways.

It exposes the danger of the typical segregated church ministry that follows the world's pattern by putting young people together too much to be influenced by their peers and does not emphasize enough parental responsibility in training, perhaps even detracting from that responsibility.

The Integrated Church material has many helpful statements on these particular issues.

The Dangers

But there are also some serious dangers represented by the Integrated Church movement.

1. The Integrated Church has often led to the downplaying of the importance of the biblical church.

This is not always true, but it is often true. Vision Forum warns about “nomadic families that flit from church to church, or renegades who refuse to place themselves under the accountability of a local church,” and adds, “God requires His people to be under biblical local churches with biblical preaching, biblical church government, biblical ordinances, and biblical discipline.”

This warning is an admission that this is a problem.

In fact, the movement is rife with this error. Many have replaced a biblical church with “home church” where the fathers are the pastors. Others have tried to start “churches”

with a few home-schooling families though they aren't qualified and divinely called to the task.

The Integrated Church movement has turned the church into a “family of families,” but the church is much more than a “family of families.” The apostle Paul wasn't even married and he emphasized the importance of the unmarried condition (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 25-35). The church's main task is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8), and when the gospel is preached effectively, the result is the salvation of single people and those from all sorts of broken families. If the emphasis is on the ideal family, on the church being “a family of families,” a great many are left out.

We see this in our church planting work in South Asia. One of our churches is eight years old, and a high percentage of the members are either unmarried young people or are men and women representing broken homes. Several of the women have unsaved husbands. Some of the husbands abuse them and try to hinder their faith in Christ; at least one is an abusive drunkard. The wife of one of the male church members left him after he came to Christ. We have only a handful of families so far that are composed of both husband and wife that are saved and are trying to raise their children right. In many cases the wives can't read and the parents have only the slightest clue of how to raise their children for Christ, though we are trying to train them. If our emphasis were on “a family of families,” we would be a very discouraged group.

Our goal is definitely to produce godly Christian families, but our church is not a family of families. It is a church! We are busy teaching the people how to build godly homes and

discipline their children biblically, but it is very slow and somewhat discouraging work, because it is all brand new to them. The Hindu culture knows nothing about such things. Most of our church members had never even seen a Bible until they heard the gospel through our evangelistic ministries. The vast majority are first generation Christians, saved out of endless generations of pagan darkness.

What we need are New Testament churches that seek to build strong families and that do not hinder the families by such worldly things as entertainment-focused youth departments. To that degree we agree with the Family Integrated philosophy, but only to that degree, because that is as far as the Bible allows us to go.

2. The Integrated Church lacks understanding about the danger of New Evangelicalism.

The Integrated Church is largely an evangelical movement rather than a fundamentalist movement. Popular speakers at their conferences include Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis and other New Evangelicals. You will find frequent positive references to evangelical leaders. There is little or no call for ecclesiastical separation. This is no light matter, as the Bible emphasizes the doctrine of separation from false doctrine and compromise (e.g., Romans 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Timothy 6:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:5; Titus 3:10). (See “New Evangelicalism: Its History, Characteristics, and Fruit,” which is available from Way of Life Literature in book and e-book formats.)

3. The Integrated Church neglects the Great Commission.

If you look through Integrated Church literature and web sites, there is little emphasis on the Great Commission and preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth. I am not saying there is nothing at all, but there is far more emphasis on the family and other things. Their conferences are not missions conferences or evangelism conferences but family and dominionist/reconstructionist conferences (emphasizing the building of the kingdom of God in the here and now). Preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth is not even mentioned in Vision Forum's mission statement.

There are exceptions such as Antioch Community Church in Elon, North Carolina, which lists the following as two of their distinctives: "commitment to local and world missions" and "planting other churches."

This church appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

The family is not an end in itself. The objective of both family and church should be the fulfillment of the Lord's Great Commission, which He emphasized greatly after He rose from the dead and before He ascended to Heaven (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

The book of Acts models the working out of the Great Commission rather than the Family Integrated Church model. Though we believe in a strong emphasis on godly families, this should not be an end in itself. Paul, a single man who could not model the strong family emphasis, preached the gospel and started churches. Paul took the young Timothy away from his family and discipled him apart from his father and mother and grandmother, and there is no evidence that Timothy ever married.

4. The Integrated Church is legalistic, having gone beyond the Bible in making rules about family and church.

The Integrated Church tends to be very legalistic. There is much liberty within the biblical model for both the family and the church, and it is legalistic to make laws that go beyond the biblical bounds.

For example, there is the teaching that the church must always be “family integrated.” A lecture published by Vision Forum says, “The biblical example is that entire families are present for corporate worship. Age-segregated worship is rooted in evolutionary humanism, not biblical Christianity” (Doug Phillips, “The Role of Children in the Meeting of the Church,” 2002, Family Renewal Audio Library).

The Bible says nothing about this one way or the other. Segregation of the ages has its dangers, but there certainly can be a time and place to teach children and young people separately from the adults. This is not contrary to any Scripture. A segregated ministry has some dangers that we need to consider and avoid, but it’s not a heresy. As the pillar and ground of the truth and possessing the Lord’s commission to “teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” the church has the authority to teach children and young people as certainly as the home has (1 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 28:19); and the church has the right to decide how to accomplish this in a practical sense. I believe there is a great benefit in having Bible classes for children and youth. The Bible nowhere says that they must always be with their parents. That is to make a law out of the Bible’s silence.

Sunday School is neither a pillar of the faith nor a heresy. It is simply a tool. The Sunday School movement began in England as a way of evangelizing children from poor families and did not meet in the church or even during normal church times. It was held in various places in the community on Sunday afternoons. The typical Sunday School today is part evangelistic and part discipleship. Each church must determine how it will fulfill Christ's command to preach the gospel to every creature and disciple those who believe, and the Sunday School can be a helpful tool if it is conducted properly. Having or not having a Sunday School doesn't determine whether a church is biblical.

If mom and dad want to keep their children with them at all times in church, and if they don't want their children to participate in youth activities, that is their prerogative before the Lord, but to go beyond this and make such things a law for everyone is to go beyond Scripture.

Another example of the legalism of the Integrated Church movement is its teaching that daughters must remain under the father's roof until marriage. The following is a review of a Vision Forum book and DVD by a fundamentalist home schooling mother that investigated their materials:

"The two items I have reviewed are the book 'So Much More,' a book to daughters about how to have 'vision' for the kingdom of God. And the DVD 'The Return of the Daughters,' a documentary on the whole idea of daughters staying under their father's roof until marriage. On the surface these items seemed to be very God-honoring. Yet, I had an unsettled feeling that something just wasn't quite right. On the DVD, it seemed very touching to want to 'protect' your daughters in the way they suggest. What Christian father wouldn't want to do the best for his daughter? Being a home school father, my husband wanted to have an open heart to what the Lord may be leading him to in the future. We spent all these years training her to be a keeper at home and as she becomes an adult, we do not want to just 'throw her to the wolves.' This is

exactly what the DVD suggests you are doing if you don't keep your daughter at home until marriage. ... The book had much material that seemed on the surface to be great. It mentioned modest dress, Christian femininity, etc. Yet, it warned daughters against an independent spirit and self-sufficiency to the point of calling working for anyone other than your dad, selfish and Marxist. It also mentioned if daughters did not have families that agreed with this vision, they should find a family that would adopt them into their families so they could fulfill this role. The whole idea was the family should not be split up at church and if you wanted to be a visionary daughter you better find a family in one of their Integrated churches so you could be a part. It was such nonsense as I have led 'bus kids' to Christ in junior church and have wondered how they would have fit in at church without any families to adopt them. There were so many other glaring flaws, often times they used Scripture quotes that were intended to be commands for our relationship to Christ, and they twisted it to be for our relationship to earthly fathers."

To teach that young women cannot leave their father's roof unless they are married is going far beyond Scripture and putting man-made yokes on God's people. Though we agree that we are not to follow the dictates and ways of today's feministic-influenced society (Psalm 1:1; Rom. 12:3) and children are to obey their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1), this does not mean that we have to submit to man-made laws that go beyond this. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice.

Is a young woman to be treated as a child? For a young woman to go to a godly Bible College and even to become a single missionary within the ministry restrictions of the New Testament Scripture (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:12) is not unscriptural. My wife was saved as a teenager when she was living in a home broken by divorce. Her father and stepfather were unbelievers so she had no earthly father to help her spirituality. She faithfully attended the best church in her area, and after she graduated from high school she attended a godly Bible College, worked in a church, and was called to

be a missionary. Before we were married, she worked as a nurse at a missionary hospital, and I do not believe that she was disobeying the Bible. A single woman can operate under the authority of the church as surely as she can under the authority of a father.

Consider Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2). She was sent by Paul on a ministry journey to Rome, and Paul instructed the church at Rome to assist her, yet no father or husband is mentioned.

To instruct young women to leave their own fathers and put themselves under another father, because her own father is not following the Integrated Church model, is actually rebellion to God's Word. Where does the Bible teach this? The Bible says, "Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). It doesn't say, "Daughters obey your father in the Lord unless he refuses to follow the Integrated Church philosophy."

Beware of Integrated Church legalism.

5. The Integrated Church will bring you into association with heresy.

As I have been examining the Integrated Church Movement, I have found many heresies that make this a dangerous movement. These are in addition to the errors that we have mentioned under the previous four points.

There is the heresy that salvation is by endurance.

Consider the following statement at a Family Integrated Church web site:

"While the dedication and discipline and athletic prowess is commendable, I fear that it may be at the expense of the

child's salvation. I know that on earth it isn't fancy, it isn't glorious, millions of people won't be shouting your or your child's name, but I want to encourage you, as a father, to daily drill the Christian fundamentals with your children. There are no medals or crowns or tiaras or sashes. But this is an endurance race and if we remain steadfast until the end, we will receive the crown of salvation that will last for eternity" (Richard Boureston, "Will Your Child Throw a 100mph Fastball in Hell?" Walk of Faith Church, Orange County's Family Integrated Church, <http://ourwalkoffaith.com/articles/orange-county-church/will-your-child-throw-a-100mph-fastball-in-hell.html>).

That is work's salvation, and it is a heresy of the first order.

There is the heresy of dominionism.

Vision Forum is devoted to dominion theology, and Vision Forum has a vast influence throughout the Integrated Church movement. They impart a "family vision for cultural reformation."

One of their DVD presentations is entitled "Training Dominion-Oriented Daughters."

Vision Forum's movie *God's Next Army* presents the goal of training young people to enter the halls of government and become national leaders for kingdom reconstructionism.

Vision Forum is associated with Patrick Henry College, an institute of higher learning for home schoolers that is devoted to a theocratic agenda of "the transformation of American society" through preparing "Christian men and women who will lead our nation and shape our culture."

Patrick Henry College, which has associations with Vision Forum, was founded by Michael P. Farris, who is also the head of the Home School Legal Defense Fund (HSLDA) and the founder of Joshua Generation Ministries. The latter is

devoted to training young people 11-19 to “become a force in the civic and political arenas” to banish pluralism from America, a dominionist, kingdom-now agenda.

Gary Demar’s American Vision organization is another reconstructionist outfit that has influence among home schoolers and integrationist churches. American Vision’s objective is to “restore America to its Biblical Foundation--from Genesis to Revelation.” The vision is of “an America that recognizes the sovereignty of God over all of life and where Christians are engaged in every facet of society.”

This fails to recognize that America was never built solidly upon the Bible. It was always built on a mixture of Bible and humanistic philosophy. Some of the founding fathers were Bible-believing Christians, while some were not. In fact, some of the chief of America’s founders were unbelieving rationalists who despised doctrines such as supernatural revelation and Christ’s atonement. These included Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. There is no pattern in the New Testament for a “Christian nation.” There is a pattern for the church and the home and for civil government but not for a Christian nation. The kingdom of God will only work in this world at a level beyond the churches when God Himself comes to sit on the throne. There is no kingdom without a king!

In his book *Ruler of the Nations*, Demar describes the dominionist philosophy as follows:

“All government requires a reference point. If God is to be pleased by men, the Bible must become the foundation of all their governments, including civil government. This means that Biblical law must be made the foundation of all righteous judgment in every government: personal (self-government), ecclesiastical, familial, and civil.”

When we look to the book of Acts and the New Testament Epistles we look in vain for a dominionist agenda. The apostles and preachers in the early churches didn't have an objective of "bringing the Roman Empire back to God" or establishing the kingdom of God within the Roman Empire. Rather, they fulfilled the Commission given by Christ to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). They preached the gospel, disciplined the brethren, established churches, lived holy lives as light in a dark world, considered themselves pilgrims in a strange land, citizens of a heavenly country, and waited on the imminent return of Christ (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

There is the heresy of Calvinistic sovereign election.

Vision Forum is founded upon and permeated with Reformed Calvinistic theology. The statement of faith includes the following:

"All who were chosen in Christ from eternity past are born again by the Holy Spirit, respond from their new hearts with repentance and faith in Jesus, are justified on the basis of the shed blood of Christ, become children of God, and are indwelt, sanctified, and sealed by the Holy Spirit until they are glorified at Christ's return."

Vision Forum books include the following: *John Calvin: Man of the Millennium*, *The Story of the English Puritans*, *The World's Greatest Reformation History Library*, *The Geneva Bible Calvin Legacy Edition*, *Children's Stories of the Reformation*, *Stories of the Covenanters in Scotland*, *Reformation Heroes*, *Famous Women of the Reformed Church*, *Puritan Fathers Classics Library*, *Gill's Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (hyper, hyper Calvinism). They even sell a statue of John Calvin.

There is the heresy of Replacement Theology and the misuse of the Law of Moses.

This heresy replaces Israel with the Church. It is for this reason that the Family Integrated Church movement brings so many things from the Old Testament directly into the New Testament church, which is a gross error. The Apostle Paul taught that the Law of Moses is not the Christian's law (2 Corinthians 3:6-18). In 2 Corinthians 3:6, the "letter that killeth" is the Law of Moses. (This verse is frequently taken out of context by New Evangelicals and ecumenists and liberals to support the heresy that the Bible should not be interpreted literally or that it should not be obeyed in all points.) Those who hold to Replacement Theology teach that the "moral code" of the Law of Moses is enforced in the Church, but Paul was specifically talking about the "moral code" in 2 Corinthians 3. He was talking about the Law that "was written and engraven in stones" (verse 7). That is the Ten Commandments! Yet he calls this Law "the ministration of death" (verse 7) and "the ministration of condemnation" (verse 9). This is because the Law of Moses requires perfect obedience in ALL points (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10; James 2:10), and sinful, fallen man cannot live up to it. Thus, the purpose of the Law of Moses was to show us God's holy character and righteous demands and man's fallen condition in order to lead men to safety in Christ (Romans 3:19-24; Galatians 3:24). Once a man places his faith in Christ, he is no longer under the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:25; Romans 7:1-4). Paul said the Law of Moses, specifically the Ten Commandments written and engraven in stones, is done away for the believer (2 Cor. 3:11). The New Testament believer has a different, an even higher law, and that is the "law of the Spirit" (Romans 8:2). The believer's law is to be conformed to the image of Christ by the power

of the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Christian's law is also called "the law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25), because while the instruction of the New Testament faith is a requirement that God places before His people, it is a law of liberty because we obey God out of gratitude for His grace in Christ and we do not have to fear eternal condemnation.

There is the heresy of denying the imminency of the return of Christ.

The Integrated Church movement largely denies an imminent Rapture, but the doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture is both Scriptural and important. (See "The Pre-Tribulation Rapture" at the Way of Life web site.) It is not a peripheral doctrine. Christ, Paul, James, and Peter taught that the Lord's return is imminent and is to be expected at any time (Mat. 24:44; Phil. 4:5; Jam. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7). The early Christians lived in expectation of Christ's return and the literal fulfillment of the prophecies. "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). The doctrine of a pre-tribulational Rapture is a great motivator for purifying one's personal Christian life. It encourages the believer in trials and persecutions (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18). It keeps the church's focus on the Great Commission. D.L. Moody had it right when he said: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'" The pre-tribulational Rapture motivates us to be busy in the Lord's work (1 Cor. 15:58). It motivates us to live obedient lives (1 Jn. 3:1-3; 1 Th. 5:4-7). It motivates us to separate from evil (Tit. 2:13-14). It keeps

believers on the outlook for heresy and apostasy (2 Timothy 4:3-4; 1 John 2:24-28).

There is the heresy of modern textual criticism.

The writings, videos, and web sites promoting the Integrated Church are filled with quotations from the modern versions, including the English Revised Version and the New International Version. There is a complete capitulation to the heresy of modern textual criticism and the smorgasbord approach to the Bible version issue. (See the following articles at the Way of Life Literature web site: “Textual Criticism Is Drawn from the Wells of Infidelity,” “Modern Textual Criticism’s Role in the Breakdown of Society,” and “The Ungodly Fruit of Modern Textual Criticism.” For a more extensive study, see the books “Modern Textual Criticism’s Hall of Shame” and “Faith vs. the Modern Bible Versions,” which are available in print and eBooks editions at the Way of Life web site.)

Conclusion to the Integrated Church and Vision Forum

The Integrated Church movement has some good points that need to be emphasized in every church today, but the good is wrapped in a theological package that has many dangers for Bible-believing fundamentalists.

Powerful Publications for These Times

Following is a selection of the titles published by Way of Life Literature. The books are available in both print and eBook editions (PDF, Kindle, PUB). The materials can be ordered via the online catalog at the Way of Life web site -- www.wayoflife.org -- or by phone 866-295-4143.

FUNDAMENTAL LESSONS IN HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE. This very practical course deals with requirements for effective Bible study, marking your Bible, and rules of Bible interpretation. 174 pages

THE BIBLE VERSION QUESTION ANSWER DATABASE, ISBN 1-58318-088-5. This book provides diligently-researched, in-depth answers to more than 80 of the most important questions on this topic. A vast number of myths are exposed, such as the myth that Erasmus promised to add 1 John 5:7 to his Greek New Testament if even one manuscript could be produced, the myth that the differences between the Greek texts and versions are slight and insignificant, the myth that there are no doctrines affected by the changes in the modern versions, and the myth that the King James translators said that all versions are equally the Word of God. It also includes reviews of several of the popular modern versions, including the Living Bible, New Living Bible, Today's English Version, New International Version, New American Standard Version, The Message, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible. 423 pages

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC: SOME QUESTIONS ANSWERED AND SOME WARNINGS GIVEN, ISBN 1-58318-094-x. This book expounds on five

reasons why we are opposed to CCM: It is worldly; it is ecumenical; it is charismatic; it is experience-oriented; and it weakens the fundamentalist stance of churches. We give examples of how changes are occurring in formerly fundamentalist churches through the instrumentality of contemporary music. The rest of the book deals with questions that are commonly asked on this subject, such as the following: What is the difference between using contemporary worship music and using old hymns that were interdenominational? Didn't Luther and the Wesleys use tavern music? Isn't the issue of music just a matter of taste? Doesn't the Bible encourage us to use cymbals and stringed and loud sounding instruments? What is wrong with soft rock? Didn't God create all music? Love is more important than doctrine and standards of living, isn't it? Since God looks on the heart, why are you concerned about appearance? Isn't Christianity all about grace? What about all of the young people who are being saved through CCM? 190 pages

THE FOREIGN SPIRIT OF CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC. This hard-hitting multi-media video presentation, published in March 2012, documents the frightful spiritual compromise, heresy, and apostasy that permeates the field of contemporary worship music. By extensive documentation, it proves that contemporary worship music is impelled by “another spirit” (2 Cor. 11:4). It is the spirit of charismaticism, the spirit of the latter rain, the spirit of the one-world church, the spirit of the world, the spirit of homosexuality, and the spirit of the false god of *The Shack*. The presentation looks carefully at the origin of contemporary worship in the Jesus Movement of the 1970s, examining the lives and testimonies of some of the most influential people. Nearly 60 video clips and hundreds of

photos are featured. It is available on DVD and as an eDownload from the Way of Life web site.

ISRAEL: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE, ISBN 978-1-58318-116-4. This is a package consisting of a 234-page illustrated book, a DVD series, and a series of Powerpoint/Keynote presentations for teachers. The package covers all of the major facets pertaining to Israel in a professional, technologically cutting-edge way: geography, culture, archaeology, history, current events, and prophecy. The series begins with an amazing aerial flyover over the land of Israel.

KEEPING THE KIDS: HOW TO KEEP THE CHILDREN FROM FALLING PREY TO THE WORLD, ISBN 978-1-58318-115-7. This book aims to help parents and churches raise children to be disciples of Jesus Christ and to avoid the pitfalls of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The book is a collaborative effort. It contains testimonies from hundreds of individuals who provided feedback to our questionnaires on this subject, as well as powerful ideas gleaned from interviews with pastors, missionaries, and church people who have raised godly children. The book is packed with practical suggestions and deals with many issues: Conversion, the husband-wife relationship, the necessity of permeating the home with Christian love, mothers as keepers at home, the father's role as the spiritual head of the home, child discipline, separation from the pop culture, discipleship of youth, the grandparents' role in "keeping the kids," effectual prayer, and fasting. 531 pages

MUSIC FOR GOOD OR EVIL (4 DVDs). This video series for July 2011 is a new replacement for previous presentations we have produced on this subject. The series, which is

packed with graphics, video and audio clips, has seven segments. I. Biblical Principles of Good Christian Music: II. Why We Reject Contemporary Christian Music. III. The Sound of Contemporary Christian Music. IV. Transformational Power of CCM. V. Southern Gospel. VI. Marks of Good Song Leading. VII. Questions Answered on Contemporary Christian Music.

ONE YEAR DISCIPLESHIP COURSE, ISBN 978-1-58318-117-1. (new title for 2011) This powerful course features 52 lessons in Christian living. It can be broken into sections and used as a new converts course, an advanced discipleship course, a Sunday School series, a Home Schooling or Bible Institute course, or preaching outlines. The lessons are thorough, meaty, and very practical. There is an extensive memory verse program built into the course, and each lesson features carefully designed review questions. 221 pages

THE PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS: THE HISTORY AND THE ERROR, ISBN 1-58318-099-0. This book begins with the author's own experience with the Pentecostal movement. The next section deals with the history of the Pentecostal movement, beginning with a survey of miraculous signs from the second to the 18th centuries. We deal with Charles Parham, Azusa Street Mission, major Pentecostal healing evangelists, the Sharon Schools and the New Order of the Latter Rain, the Word-Faith movement and its key leaders, the Charismatic Movement, the Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Pentecostal Prophets, the Third Wave, the Laughing-Drunken Revival of Toronto, Pensacola, Lakeland, etc., and the recent Pentecostal scandals. The last section deals with the

theological errors of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements. 317 pages

REPENTANCE AND SOUL WINNING, ISBN 1-58318-062-1. This is an in-depth study on biblical repentance and a timely warning about unscriptural methods of presenting the gospel. The opening chapter, entitled “Fundamental Baptists and Quick Prayerism: A Faulty Method of Evangelism Has Produced a Change in the Doctrine of Repentance,” traces the change in the doctrine of repentance among fundamental Baptists during the past 50 years. 2008 edition, 201 pages

SEEING THE NON-EXISTENT: EVOLUTION’S MYTHS AND HOAXES, ISBN 1-58318-002-8. (new title for 2011) This book is designed both as a stand alone title as well as a companion to the apologetics course *AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH*. The contents are as follows: Canals on Mars, Charles Darwin and His Granddaddy, Thomas Huxley: Darwin’s Bulldog, Ernst Haeckel: Darwin’s German Apostle, Icons of Evolution, Icons of Creation, The Ape-men, Predictions, Questions for Evolutionists, Darwinian Gods, Darwin’s Social Influence.

SOWING AND REAPING: A COURSE IN EVANGELISM. ISBN 978-1-58318-169-0. This new course (for 2012) is unique in several ways. *It is unique in its approach*. While it is practical and down-to-earth, it does not present a formulaic approach to soul winning, recognizing that individuals have to be dealt with as individuals. The course does not include any sort of psychological manipulation techniques. It does not neglect repentance in soul winning, carefully explaining the biblical definition of repentance and the place of repentance in personal

evangelism. It explains how to use the law of God to plow the soil of the human heart so that the gospel can find good ground. *The course is unique in its objective.* The objective of biblical soul winning is not to get people to “pray a sinner’s prayer”; the objective is to see people soundly converted to Christ. This course trains the soul winner to pursue genuine conversions as opposed to mere “decisions.” *The course is also unique in its breadth.* It covers a wide variety of situations, including how to deal with Hindus and with skeptics and how to use apologetics or evidences in evangelism. There is a memory course consisting of 111 select verses and links to a large number of resources that can be used in evangelism, many of them free. The course is suitable for teens and adults and for use in Sunday School, Youth Ministries, Preaching, and private study. **OUTLINE:** The Message of Evangelism, Repentance and Evangelism, God’s Law and Evangelism, The Reason for Evangelism, The Authority for Evangelism, The Power for Evangelism, The Attitude in Evangelism, The Technique of Evangelism, Using Tracts in Evangelism, Dealing with Skeptics. 104 pages, 8x11, spiral bound.

THINGS HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD: A HANDBOOK OF BIBLICAL DIFFICULTIES, ISBN 1-58318-002-8. This very practical volume deals with a wide variety of biblical difficulties. Find the answer to the seeming contradictions in the Bible. Meet the challenge of false teachers who misuse biblical passages to prove their doctrine. Find out the meaning of difficult passages that are oftentimes overlooked in the Bible commentaries. Our objective is to help God’s people have confidence in the inerrancy of their Bibles and to protect them from the false teachers that abound in these last days. Jerry Huffman, editor of *Calvary Contender*, testified: “You don’t have to agree

with everything to greatly benefit from this helpful book.”
Fourth edition April 2006, 385 pages

AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH: A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS COURSE, ISBN 978-1-58318-119-5. (new title for 2011) The course is built upon nearly 40 years of serious Bible study and 30 years of apologetics writing. Research was done in the author’s personal 6,000-volume library plus in major museums and other locations in America, England, Europe, Australia, Asia, and the Middle East. The package consists of an apologetics course entitled *AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH* (both print and eBook editions) plus an extensive series of Powerpoint/Keynote presentations. (Keynote is the Apple version of Powerpoint.) The 1,800 PowerPoint slides deal with archaeology, evolution/creation science, and the prophecies pertaining to Israel’s history. The material in the 360-page course is extensive, and the teacher can decide whether to use all of it or to select only some portion of it for his particular class and situation. After each section there are review questions to help the students focus on the most important points. The course can be used for private study as well as for a classroom setting. Sections include The Bible’s Nature, The Bible’s Proof, The Dead Sea Scrolls, The Bible’s Difficulties, Historical Evidence for Jesus, Evidence for Christ’s Resurrection, Archaeological Treasures Confirming the Bible, A History of Evolution, Icons of Evolution, Icons of Creation, Noah’s Ark and the Global Flood.

WAY OF LIFE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE & CHRISTIANITY, ISBN 1-58318-005-2. This lovely hardcover Bible Encyclopedia contains 640 pages (8.5X11) of information, with more than 6,000 entries, and 7,000 cross-references. It is a complete dictionary of biblical

terminology and features many other areas of research not often covered in Bible reference volumes. Subjects include Bible versions, Denominations, Cults, Christian Movements, Typology, the Church, Social Issues and Practical Christian Living, Bible Prophecy, and Old English Terminology. An evangelist in South Dakota wrote: “If I were going to the mission field and could carry only three books, they would be the Strong’s concordance, a hymnal, and the *Way of Life Bible Encyclopedia*.” Missionary author Jack Moorman says: “The encyclopedia is excellent. The entries show a ‘distilled spirituality.’” A computer edition of the Encyclopedia is available as a standalone eBook for PDF, Kindle, and PUB. It is also available as a module for *Swordseacher*.

Way of Life Literature

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The House Church Movement

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