

And They Will Make Merchandise of You

By Michael Clark and George Davis

There is a great problem among Christians today because most of us do not know that in the mind of God there is a distinct dividing wall, a great gulf fixed between the kingdom of heaven (thus His Church) and the systems and intelligence behind the kingdoms of this world.

But there also arose false prophets among the people, as among you also there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. In covetousness they will exploit you [KJV- make merchandise of you] with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. 2 Peter 2:1-3 WEB

Paul wrote to the Romans, "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:2-4, NKJV).

In the early church, when you were baptized into the faith, baptism was not only an outward sign of your belief, trust in Jesus and becoming a Christian, but it was also a sign that you were being translated from one kingdom allegiance to another. We are dead to the things of this world and alive unto Christ and His kingdom alone. Nothing of this world system can be translated or used in the kingdom of God or vice versa. We are to be dead to the one and alive to the other.

In his book *The Normal Christian Life*, Watchman Nee wrote:

But in order to bring us into His New Kingdom, God must do something new in us. He must make of us new creatures. Unless we are created anew we can never fit into the new. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"; and, "flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption

inherit incorruption" (John 3: 6; 1 Corinthians 15:50). However educated, however cultured, however improved it be, flesh is still flesh. Our fitness for the new kingdom is determined by the creation to which we belong. Do we belong to the old creation or to the new? Are we born of the flesh or of the Spirit? Our ultimate suitability for the new realm hinges on the question of origin. The question is not "good or bad?" but "flesh or Spirit?". "That which is born of the flesh is flesh", and it will never be anything else. That which is of the old creation can never pass over into the new.

Watchman Nee wrote another book that should be foundational reading for every Christian along with *The Normal Christian Life*. This second book is *Love Not the World*. The following paragraphs from this book sum up what it means to be a Christian in this world system and just how important it is to be in the world, but not of it.

While it is true that these definitions of "the world," as (1) the material earth or universe, (2) the people on the earth, and (3) the things of the earth, each contribute something to the whole picture, it will already be apparent that behind them all is something more. The classical idea of orderly arrangement or organization helps us to grasp what this is. Behind all that is tangible we meet something that is intangible, we meet a planned system; and in this system there is a harmonious functioning, a perfect order.

Concerning this system there are two things to be emphasized. First, since the day when Adam opened the door for evil to enter God's creation, the world order has shown itself to be hostile to God. The world "knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21), "hated" Christ (John 15:18) and "cannot receive" the spirit of truth (14:17). "Its works are evil" (John 7:7) and "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). Hence Jesus says, "My kingdom Is not of this world" (John 18:36). He has "overcome the world" (16:33) and "the victory that has overcome the world" is "our faith" in Him (1 John 5:4). . .[thus] the world is under judgment (John 12:31-32).

God's attitude to it is uncompromising. This is because, secondly, as the same verse make clear, there is a mind behind the system. John writes repeatedly of "the prince of this world" (12:31; 14:30; 16:11). In His epistle he describes him as "he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4) and matches against

him the Spirit of Truth who indwells believers. "The whole world," says John, "lieth in the evil one" (5:19). He is the rebellious kosmokrator, world ruler--a word which, however, appears only once, used in the plural of his lieutenants, the "world rulers of this darkness" (Ephesians 6:12).

There is, then, an ordered system, "the world," which is governed from behind the scenes by a ruler, Satan. When in John 12:31 Jesus states that the sentence of judgment has been passed upon this world He does not mean that the material world or its inhabitants are judged. For them judgment is yet to come. What is there judged is that institution, that harmonious world order of which Satan himself is the originator and head. And ultimately, as Jesus' words make clear, it is he, "the prince of this world," who has been judged (16:11) and who is to be dethroned and "cast out" for ever.

Scripture thus gives depth to our understanding of the world around us. Indeed, unless we look at the unseen powers behind the material things we may readily be deceived.

Both Paul and Peter wrote of the death of the cross and the symbolism of baptism. "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14, NKJV). ". . .who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:20-21, RSV).

Salvation, then, is being translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son. "Giving thanks to the Father, who made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love (Colossians 1:12-13). John exhorts us, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15)

The problem is that this line of separation has become non-distinct and blurred in the minds of too many Christians. Man thinks that he can take the best of both worlds, using the values and methods of this world system for the glory of God.

Nowhere is there greater confusion about God's disdain for the things of this world order than in the area of marketing and merchandising in the Church.

So Where Is the Church Heading Today?

In a recent publication of Forbes magazine entitled "Christian Capitalism, Megachurches, Megabusineses," 1 author Luisa Kroll wrote, "Maybe churches aren't so different from corporations." After that she listed a number of the Megachurches of today, noting the similarities between them and corporate America. "Welcome to the megabusiness of megachurches" writes Kroll, "where pastors often act as chief executives and use business tactics to grow their congregations. This entrepreneurial approach has contributed to the explosive growth of megachurches."

It should not surprise us when a publication such as Forbes recognizes megachurches as big business. That is exactly what they are and who better to confirm this fact than Forbes, the nation's premier business magazine? As we read on in this article, it became apparent that what we thought at first was a scolding expose was in fact a commendation, praising churches for finally coming around and doing things the right way. Kroll went on to show how helping churches grow has also become big business. In fact, there is one company called Kingdom Ventures that does nothing but "help smaller churches become big with technology." Their new book entitled PastorPreneur, which teaches pastors to think like entrepreneurs, is soon coming to bookstores near you.

Anyone who has ever had a relationship with the living Christ must ask, "Since when has Jesus become dependent on world business methods and technology to promote the gospel of the kingdom and grow His Church?" Is this the rock He told Peter that He would build His church on-- common business practices? Where once the Lord added to the Church daily as many as should be saved, now we see a church growing itself by appealing to the world's sense of taste. Where once the Spirit of God drew people, now people are enticed with sensationalism and entertainment. Such grand productions and the advertising to promote them cost big



bucks. Enter PastorPreneur, the best pastor money can buy, who will more than balance the bottom line.

On a web site entitled Outreach Marketing, we were introduced to a new church growth concept called "Outreach Comedy." We see the future of Christian evangelism in an article entitled "Outreach Comedy Puts A New (Smiling) Face On Christian Events." We quote:

"Outreach Comedy offers a fresh and culturally relevant solution to reach a diverse audience with the message of Christ. Comedy events not only provide a fun and 'invite-able' event, but one that people will want to bring their unbelieving friends to. Outreach Comedy General Manager, Dionne Petitpas, states, "Outreach Comedy equips leaders to both reach the unchurched as well as edify believers in a unique and enjoyable way - by providing a host of top-quality, hilarious performers with an effective Christ-honoring message."

2

Gone is the appeal of Jesus to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. Gone is the gospel of His Father's kingdom that turned the world upside down. Now we see a Church that has been turned upside down by the world and its practices, that no longer needs the power of the Holy Spirit. How did the early Church ever make it without "a host of top-quality, hilarious performers with an effective Christ-honoring message"? Have we fallen so far that we prefer a form of godliness without the power of God? Has it become acceptable to resort to the methods of the world because we have lost the power of heaven? Are we laughing all the way to hell? How can we so freely incorporate the world's principles and pleasures and call it church growth?

The American Society for Church Growth (ASCG) gives us a clue. "Church growth. . . is a spiritual conviction, yet it is practical, combining the eternal principles of God's Word with the practical insights of social and behavioral sciences."³ The practical philosophy of evangelism today mixes the spiritual with the practical and dilutes the eternal with societal and behavioral sciences. As a result of this unholy mixture, a typical gathering of a megachurch is like a Broadway show, complete with stage band, lighting to set the mood, special singing, dancing, oration from a master of all the marketing skills of Madison Avenue, and the latest computer aided overhead

presentations. Who is affecting whom? Today we see a church that is so dead it has resorted to the world's marketing strategies in an attempt to grow numerically. Might makes right. It is the bottom line that counts.

True spiritual growth in Christ has become passé. The Church today looks more like the Bazaar of Annas that filled the outer courts of the temple 2000 years ago, than the body of Christ. It resembles a marketplace more than a loving community, and is more like a den of thieves than a house of prayer (Matthew 21:12). The noise of the moneychangers' tables crescendos above the muted prayers of the few that "sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (see Ezekiel 9:4). As it was in the time of Ezekiel's prophesy, judgment is on its way.

It Is All About Marketing - The Way of Cain

As we look out at Christendom today; marketing is the name of the game. This marketing-mania we are seeing is more a meter of apostasy rather than progress. Sorry, American Church, but your merchandising is a sure sign of spiritual deadness. How could we say such a thing? Merchandising is as American as apple pie, and from our youth we have heard the praises of capitalism. Merchandising is both a spirit and an exact science of carnal man. It does not belong in the True Church, or the kingdom of God. In fact, if you look at the subject in the scripture, it is rarely mentioned in a positive light.

Some of the most idolatrous and brutal societies and people were given to merchandising. The most notable of these were Cain, Tyre, Sidon, and Babylon. One of the definitions of Canaanite is "merchant or trader." It was a band of Midianites that bought Joseph from his brothers and sold him as a slave in Egypt. The family of Annas, the high priest during Jesus' years of ministry, plotted to have Him killed after He turned over their money changing tables in the temple and disrupted their commerce. Jesus warned, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." And what a perfect love of money and hatred of Jesus they had, so much so that He told them that they were of their father the devil, who was a liar and murderer from the beginning.

The Father of Merchandising

Now let's look at the roots of mercantilism. Let's go back to a gentler time--a time when a gold nugget was only a pretty rock, a time before money, building, buying and selling, a time before theft and murder, a time of greater innocence and generosity. No, this is not the introduction to a fairytale. It is a true story about the dawning days of mankind.

In these early days, before governments and corporate greed, two brothers came bringing their offerings to the Lord. One came with a heart filled with gratitude for God's generous bounty in his life. The other came with an evil heart out of a sense of religious duty. The eldest was named Cain and the younger was Abel. God, who sees the hearts of men, showed favor on Abel's offering. This angered his elder brother. God, seeing the anger in Cain's heart, warned him, "Sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it" (Genesis 4:7). It was well within Cain's power to resist this sin, but he did not. In spite of God's warning, Cain plotted to draw his younger brother out into the field, then rose up and killed him. The judgment of God on Cain is as follows:

And now you are cursed more than the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it will not again give its strength to you. And you shall be a vagabond (a rover or wanderer) and a fugitive in the earth. (Genesis 4:11-12 MKJV)

When Adam and Eve first fell, the ground was cursed. "Cursed is the ground for your sake" (Genesis 3:17). Now a new and greater curse was placed on the descendents of Cain. Cain was not just cursed; he was bitterly cursed. By the spilling of innocent blood, he was cursed more than the ground. Cain's act of violence brought a great acceleration of sin--a new expression of sin that was unknown in God's creation before that time. While it might be argued that this development was simply the logical outgrowth of Adam's sin, it is clear from scripture that this sin can be traced back only to Cain and not to Seth, the younger brother who replaced Abel.

Something terrible was crouching at the door, poised to spring on an unsuspecting humanity, bringing an increase of iniquity that would so pollute the human race that God would regret ever having created them. Alfred Edersheim wrote regarding the fruit of this sin, "Cain. . .built a city, which has been aptly described as the laying of the first foundations of that kingdom in which 'the spirit of the beast' prevails." (For a look at its final form see Revelation chapters 17-19).

The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, described the changes that occurred in the earth after Cain unleashed the sin that was crouching at the door.

"And when Cain had traveled over many countries, he, with his wife, built a city, named Nod, which is a place so called, and there he settled his abode; where also he had children. However, he did not accept of his punishment in order to amendment, but to increase his wickedness; for he only aimed to procure every thing that was for his own bodily pleasure, though it obliged him to be injurious to his neighbors. He augmented his household substance with much wealth, by rapine (plundering or theft) and violence; he excited his acquaintance to procure pleasures and spoils by robbery, and became a great leader of men into wicked courses. He also introduced a change in that way of simplicity wherein men lived before; and was the author of measures and weights. And whereas they lived innocently and generously while they knew nothing of such arts, he changed the world into cunning craftiness.

"He first of all set boundaries about lands: he built a city, and fortified it with walls, and he compelled his family to come together to it; and called that city Enoch, after the name of his eldest son Enoch. . .Nay, even while Adam was alive, it came to pass that the posterity of Cain became exceeding wicked, every one successively dying, one after another, more wicked than the former. They were intolerable in war, and vehement in robberies; and if any one were slow to murder people, yet was he bold in his profligate behavior, in acting unjustly, and doing injuries for gain."

Out of Cain's rebellion sprang a system of merchandising that gave rise to the oppressor, the raiser of taxes, and the taskmaster. Without doubt, the exactor and the gold gatherer are responsible for every form of slavery and oppression in the world today.

It was this compounding of sin that finally brought on the judgment of the flood. Isn't it amazing how much this sounds like hedonistic America today? We see greedy men amassing great wealth gathered by plundering, theft and violence. The unjust measures and weights of Cain are still in use today to facilitate and legitimize open theft. The way of simplicity, living innocently and generously with one another, has been lost in America and most of the world because of the spirit of merchandising. The sin that was crouching at Cain's door is still working its corruption in families, cities, townships, states, nations and yes, even churches, changing them "into a world of cunning craftiness."

The whole meaning of community has been lost, especially in today's commercialized church system. Once church leaders took up offerings to benefit the poor and needy (see Acts 4:32-37). Now, the money received in church coffers goes for pastoral staff salaries and church buildings, a thing unheard of in the first two centuries of church history.

Jesus prophesied that before the coming judgment it would once again be as it was in the days of Noah, when the earth was filled with the feasting, drinking and hedonism of Cain. It would be as it was in the corrupted society of Sodom where it was business as usual, "They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built." (see Luke 17:26-32). Can anyone look around western culture and its churches and not see this prophecy fulfilled?

Without doubt, the prevailing conditions on the earth today are identical to what existed before the judgment of the flood and the judgment of Sodom. The export of American hedonism has infected the whole world, and the church has been privy to it in its evangelism of the heathen. It goes forth converting men to its corrupt American ways, convincing all that this is true Christianity. The lust for wealth has found a home in the gospel of prosperity, and gain preached as godliness is commonplace (see 1 Timothy 6:1-11).

The lust of Cain has found a home in the clergy who now rule the church. We read recently where a Pentecostal minister pleaded guilty to five counts of bank robbery and faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. 4 Is this the way of Cain or not? He robbed widows and orphans of their due, so why not rob a bank? Is not this more noble?

Merchandising and the Prince of Tyre

By far the most revealing portion of scripture connecting satanic influence and corrupting power in the area of marketing is found in a proclamation against the Prince of Tyre in Ezekiel 28.

Behold, you are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you! With your wisdom and your understanding You have gained riches for yourself, And gathered gold and silver into your treasuries; By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches, And your heart is lifted up because of your riches. . . You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. . . You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you. You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more forever (Ezekiel 28:3-19, NKJV).

There is some debate over the identity of this prince. Was he a physical king? The prophecy seems to make no distinction between the city of Tyre with its human prince and Lucifer and his unseen minions. The visible city of Tyre was merely a manifestation of the nature, drive and ambition of the prince of this world (Satan). This becomes clear when we read the entire chapter. Tyre had so taken on the nature and ambition of the prince of this world that the prophet addressed them as one and the same.

The maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon were renown for their merchandising. The ships of Tarshish carried their commodities throughout that part of the world. They subjugated nations through their idolatrous trade. At the heart of their

merchandising was a design to conquer the people they traded with, and Israel eventually became one of their subject states.

The history of Israel shows us how this idolatry spread and took the nations captive. Tyre and Sidon had no agricultural base and certainly had their eyes on the fertile soil of Israel. It was the custom of kings to finalize a covenant by giving their daughters as wives to other kings. Such a covenant was struck between Ahab, the corrupt king of Israel, and Ethbaal king of Sidon. The prize was Jezebel, Ethbaal's daughter. So it was that Ahab took Jezebel, an inhabitant of Sidon, the sister-city of Tyre, as his wife. This was the beginning of Israel's sorrows!

Jezebel's strategy was to first dominate the king and then weaken the faith and morals of Israel itself. She brought her idols with her and constructed temples to Baal. Then came the priests of Baal who administered the rite of fertility to the wives of Israel by having sex with them. And there were also the temple prostitutes, who were sexual predators, assigned the duty of searching the countryside with one objective in mind--to seduce every man in Israel. The groves of trees were planted for this reason. Isaiah lamented over Israel's fallen state when he prophesied, "[Are you not children of transgression, offspring of falsehood, inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?](#)"

Tyre and Sidon also traded with the people of Israel and practiced usury (lending money with interest) to lead them away captive. Whole families lost their lands and then their freedom. Children were taken away from their families to become slaves and the young girls became temple prostitutes. What land they could not get by usury they took by deceit and force. Remember Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21? By the abundance of their trading the land was filled with violence. Many of the prophets of God were killed as they dared to speak out against Israel's fallen state. It was so bad that at one time, Elijah thought he was the only prophet of God left and Jezebel hunted for him so that she could kill him. Before long Israel was all but completely subdued. Things were much worse than we can convey in so few words, but here we catch a sufficient glimpse of the logical outworking and development of the principality of Tyre and Sidon.

The Fall of the Church in America and the West

The growing focus on merchandising in Christendom today is rooted in the corrupted wisdom of the prince of Tyre, who desires to once again lead the people of God away captive. Everything is coming to its full manifestation. Have you ever wondered why the church in America is so impotent against sin, sickness and the wiles of the enemy? Why is her divorce rate higher than that of the world? Why are pastors being sent to jail for all manner of crimes? Why are they suffering from "pastor burn-out" at every turn?

I, Michael, once asked a missionary from India why the church over there sees so many signs and wonders just like we read about in the Book of Acts, while we see so little of God's power in American churches. His answer was short and to the point. "You can not serve both God and Mammon. We are a poor nation, and you have the highest standard of living of anywhere in the world. We in our part of the world seek first the spiritual. You seek after a minimum standard of living first. You get what you seek after."

With this in mind, consider Jesus' words to his disciples as He sent them out. "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8, NKJV). Jesus did not teach them to sell the gospel or take up offerings. A brother quipped the other day how these words of Christ in today's churches seem to read, "Freely you have received, now write books, make tapes and sell them for all you can get!" You cannot have it both ways. Seek mammon, and mammon is your only reward. You will be weak in the face of your enemy and helpless against all his wiles.

Once Dominic, a contemporary of Francis of Assisi, visited Rome. The pope gave him the grand tour, showing him the vast treasures of the Vatican. Afterwards the pope said, "Well, Peter can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" To this Dominic replied, "Neither can he say, 'Rise and walk.'" Seek first the kingdom of the Father and His righteousness, and He will see to it that all spiritual things are yours.

Babylon, Merchandising, and the Church Today

Throughout the scriptures, Babylon is a symbol of opposition to the Kingdom of God and represents the oppression and captivity of His people. Babylon stands for

everything that the kingdom of heaven is not. The wedge of gold and the fine Babylonian garment found in Achan's tent (see Joshua 7) forever stand as symbols of pride and greed that found a home among the people of God and weakened them before the weakest of their enemies. Isaiah prophesied to Israel, "[You shall lift up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say: How the exactor, the gold gatherer, has ceased!](#)" (Isaiah 14:4 LITV)

The word exactor (Hebrew-nagas) means to press, drive, oppress, exact, or exert demanding pressure. In Exodus 5:6, this same Hebrew word is translated taskmasters, referring to those who oppressed the children of Israel during their Egyptian bondage. It is also translated oppressor (Job 3:18), driver (Job 39:7), and raiser of taxes (Daniel 11:20).

Isaiah later prophesied against Israel about this tendency to exact their own people when he said, "[Wherefore have we fasted,' say they, 'and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?' Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.](#)"

Here we see a direct connection between the oppression of heathen Babylon and the oppression that is found among the religious leaders of Israel. Here it is obvious that religion takes on the way of Cain to get power over the people, and also attempts to get power over God! As the old saying goes, the tail seeks to wag the dog. Everywhere we look today, we see men in the church lusting after power over the faithful. They openly lust after the wealth of the Gentile believers, so much so that the needs of the widows, orphans and the destitute are only given token notice at best.

Exacting and the Tithe

Part of this spirit of exacting is the demand of leadership that their followers give them ten percent of their gross income. There is nowhere in the Bible where God's people were commanded to give so that a handful of religious leaders could live like kings. What we do find in the Old Testament is a call for the people of God to bring forth a tenth of the increase of their crops and herds to the tabernacle of the Lord to

celebrate that increase and feast before the Lord. Nowhere were they commanded to give ten percent of their gross income or increase to the priests.

In the New Testament it is even more noticeable that those things given by the faithful were from the extra abundance and were given to meet the needs of all who were without. Their act of love was so great that it was distributed to all who had needs and no one was lacking. Today as we look at the huge buildings, garish decorations and large salaries paid out to the few in control of the churches, it is all too obvious that this same kind of benevolence to the least of the kingdom is a thing of the past. Everywhere, we see the fruit of the exactor and the gatherer of gold, and once more end times prophecy is fulfilled.

Paul saw the Old Testament as a parable that instructs us how we should and should not live as the saints of God. He wrote to the Corinthian church:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. (1 Corinthians 10:1-6, NKJV).

The Law of Jubilee vs. Give Us a King

When Israel inhabited the land of promise after being judged in the wilderness for their sin, God established laws to ensure that they would not oppress one another through merchandising (Leviticus 25:14, 17). He reminded them, "And remember, the land must never be sold on a permanent basis because it really belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenants living with me" (Leviticus 25:23, NLT). God also instituted the fiftieth year Jubilee to ensure that merchandising would never take root in Israel. During this fiftieth year, all properties were returned and all debts were expunged so that all the tribes were once again in possession of their original inheritance. God intended that the original tribal allotment of lands given by Him would always be restored. God took extra care to ensure that the poor were not taken advantage of and that their needs were not overlooked. We find one such

safeguard in Leviticus 23:22. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap into the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest: you shall leave them for the poor, and for the foreigner. I am Yahweh your God." As you can see, God was very serious about keeping Israel free of the way of Cain and the oppression that it brings.

Notwithstanding, before long the people came to the prophet Samuel and asked for a king like the pagan nations around them. They rejected the God of the universe as their King and wanted a mere man to rule over them instead. The tragic consequences were soon realized. Their king restored the way of Cain. Six times God warned them, "he [Saul] will take." Saul would take their sons. He would take their daughters. He would take their fields and vineyards. He would take the tenth of their seed. He would take their men-servants, and their maidservants, and he would take the tenth of their flocks. (See 1 Samuel 8:11-19). God wanted them to understand that the price of their request was heavy taxation and oppression. *Nagas* --exacting under a human king--was now in full swing. Here we see the first example of mandatory tithing.

It happened just as God had warned. Soon "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered at the cave of Adullam (see 1 Samuel 22:2), where the true anointed of God, David, was also hiding. Saul, like Cain, was enraged that God had favored another more than himself, and desired to rise up like Cain and slay his brother. Many of us who have known God's anointing on our lives have felt this same spirit and seen this very thing acted out by church leadership where we have tried to find fellowship. Those who are not of the spirit of Cain and Saul are marked, and those of that spirit know that we are not one of them.

Mystery Babylon, the Mother of Harlots

Here we see the true power behind the throne of Babylon. Like Tyre and Sidon, the true king of Babylon is Lucifer. By the abundance of his trading, he became filled with violence. The true king of Babylon is he who said in his heart, "[I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit on the mountain of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.](#)" (Isaiah 14:13-14).

This is the most accurate description of the antichrist spirit. He is the real exactor. He is the trafficker in the souls of men. In Revelation we read:

He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (Revelation 13:16, 17, NKJV).

We find it interesting that the Great Whore and her daughters, who made the merchants of the world rich with their harlotries, are introduced only four chapters after the mark of the beast--the mark that is necessary to buy or sell--is mentioned in chapter thirteen. They are up to their golden crowns in merchandising. What is even more remarkable is God's people are caught up in this delusion (see Revelation 18:4). The whore and her daughters have taken the mark of the beast or there would be no merchandising among them. This Great Whore and her daughters are a prophetic type of modern Christendom (Catholic and Protestant alike) and the mixture it has become.

Taking a close look at Revelation chapters seventeen and eighteen makes this all too obvious. Why else would the angel of God be calling out, "Come out of her, my people and partake not of her sins, lest you also partake of her plagues"? Will His people hear this woeful warning? The whore and her daughters are continuing to wax rich, increasing with goods as they displace Jesus. In their own eyes, they need nothing, not even Him.

What we see of the fallen church in Laodicea is the embryonic form of the apostasy to follow. Compare this church described in Revelation 3:14-22 with the depiction of the Great Whore. Because of her merchandising and riches, she thinks she needs nothing. Consider these comparisons:

Spirit of Babylon in seed form:

Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." (Revelation 3:17a, NKJV).

Spirit of Babylon in full form:

The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Revelation 17:4, 5, NKJV).

For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. (Revelation 18:3, NKJV).

In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' (Revelation 18:7, NKJV).

And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. (Revelation 18:11-13, NKJV).

And it all comes to naught.

". . .and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17b, NKJV).

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." (Revelation 3:15, 16, NKJV).

The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, "Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!" For in one hour such great riches came to nothing. (Revelation 18:15-17a, NKJV).

A divine warning:

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (Revelation 3:18, NKJV).

And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. (Revelation 17:16, NKJV).

A divine bidding to come unto Him:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Revelation 3:19-21, NKJV).

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." (Revelation 18:4, NKJV).

The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth. (Revelation 18:23-24, NKJV). [Note: Not only her lamp stand (see Revelation 2:5) has been removed, but the lamp itself is now gone. Also the bride has gone out of here and joined her Bridegroom.]

Coming out of Babylon unto Jesus:

Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: Blessed are those

who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:5-10, NKJV).

Here we see a bride that is continuing to call out to Jesus and repent of the Laodicean spirit of self-sufficiency and marketing. The bride is making herself ready, follows the Lamb wherever he goes, and is not defiled by these women (see Revelation 14:4). What women? The harlot and her daughters.

Remember in chapter three where we read, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"? To rule and reign with Christ in HIS throne, we must overcome. Overcome what? What is it that makes a Christian lukewarm? The context has to do with gathering the world's riches in the name of Jesus. It is the Laodicean mindset that confuses worldly gain with the spiritual blessing, not the Spirit of Christ.

What did Jesus have to overcome? At the beginning of his earthly ministry, Satan tempted him to use His God given power for His own comfort. "If you are the Son of God," Satan said, "command this stone to turn into bread." Jesus was also tempted to take to Himself the kingship and wealth of the nations of the world.

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Matthew 4:8-10)

First notice here how the devil, as shown in Isaiah 14, offers the exceedingly high places that he wants himself. He is quite content to rule mankind by proxy. How many of God's ministers start out with the best of intentions to be a lowly servant to the people of God and hear this same temptation? Satan tempts them to use their gifts to get gain and the power and to rule over the saints of God. How many have become unwitting tools in this great Deceiver's hands, and are used to oppress the people of the Most High?

What Ever Happened to the Gospel to the Poor?

If we are to have kingdom power to be ministers of Christ, we too, must overcome this same temptation. If not we will never be able to stand with Jesus and say, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Instead we will become part of the problem and not the solution.

In his new book, *Radical Revival: The Problem of Wineskins Today*, Howard Snyder writes:

There is loose in the church the strange idea that solid self-supporting churches cannot be planted among the poor, at least not without heavy subsidies and leadership from richer churches. There is truth to this--if we mean churches modeled after the traditional institutionalized pattern of expensive buildings and bureaucratic organization. But if our concern is to plant new Testament churches, we had better take a second look at the New Testament gospel. And what it says about the poor.

Today church planting is all about ministry to the rich. Church planters study community demographics and avoid the poor and the needy. They soon drive away any sheep with real problems, seeing them as "high maintenance" people. Today, church growth and church planting is all about material success and the needy make poor grist for the machines of church planners like these.

How opposite all this is from the counsel of James when he wrote:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and

heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? (James 2:1-6, NKJV).

We give honor to the rich who are poor in faith and exploit the poor who are rich in faith. It's all about honoring the techniques of modern marketing.

Consider these warnings of Jesus for a moment as you ponder the merits of merchandising and the Church:

And [Jesus] said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. (John 2:16, KJV).

Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: (Matthew 22:4, 5, KJV).

I, Michael, once worked in a factory that supplied retailers with their wares. Almost every production push was aimed at a "Christian" holiday season. In December they started their Valentine's run. In February they started their Easter run. In March they started their July 4th run. In July they started their Halloween (All Saints Day eve) run. In October they started their Christmas run, and then it started all over again. The Fourth of July was the only holiday that wasn't "Christian" (but not scriptural) in origin. The apostate church has prostituted herself and is in bed with the merchants of the world, pure and simple. Why are we so blind that we can not see it? Once again the Lord's house of prayer has become a den of thieves.

Will we all with one consent begin to make excuse as the Spirit bids us to come to the marriage supper of the Lamb? Will our belongings and business endeavors and church planting mean more to us than heading His voice? Will we be those who stand before Him, insisting that we have cast out demons, healed the sick and done many great things in His name? Will we hear, "Depart from me, you who work iniquity"? Babylon's fall will come right out of left field--in one hour. People will not see it coming. Once it happens it will be too late to repent. We must make our

choices now to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. We must come out of her before we partake of her plagues.

Not one stone was left on another with Herod's temple that housed the bazaar of Annas after Jesus prophesied its demise. Neither will there be one stone left on another in the house of Babylon the Great and her daughters who make merchandise of the people of God. Father is separating the wheat from the tares, the holy from the profane, the sheep from the goats, the just from the unjust, and the wise virgins from the foolish.

The Father will have many mature sons unto His glory, the Son will have a glorious bride who is completely dedicated to Him, and the Spirit will have His glorious temple made of living stones. There is the Church and there is the church. There is the whore and there is the bride. Everyone may appear to be in the same boat at this time, but not so for those who have come out of her (Revelation 18:4).

Remember it is the pure in heart who will see God as He is. It is the bride of Christ who makes herself ready for His kingdom, refusing to be influenced by the wealth of this world. Will we seek a kingdom for ourselves on this earth, or will we heed the advice of the writer of Hebrews?

Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. (Hebrews 13:12-14, NKJV).

The Gehazi Effect

I, Michael, recently received an invitation to an up and coming conference. To attend you were required to pay \$45 at the door. An old friend was one of the guest speakers and the folks putting it on were previous church friends. Here is the letter I hoped would appeal to their reason:

As much as I would like to see you and my friend _____ once again, I can not help him prostitute his gift by paying to see and receive from him, so I guess I will have to forgo. Please tell him "Hi" for us.

Here is part of the reason why I can not do ministry the way it is done in the American church today.

When the Spirit first started moving through me in the prophetic, He warned me not to run after any kind of worldly gain by the use of His gifts or I would end up like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha (see 2 Kings 5).

Last night I was talking with some guests and fellow saints from Alaska, telling them about my experience with physical healings. I told them about one lady with cancer that my wife and I prayed for. Part of the requirement that I laid down before praying for her was that she was not to know my name or where I lived and that I wanted absolutely nothing that she had or could give. This sister owns a large ranch that had once been a Christian retreat center until her husband died. Now it is used for boarding horses and has a large guesthouse with studio apartments that is her means of support.

Her cancer was in advanced stages when we prayed for her, and her son-in-law brought her out of the bedroom in a wheel chair. She looked near death. After praying, we saw no immediate results, but we heard later that she began to get better at that point and in a few weeks she was totally healed and gave all the glory to God. She was not only completely free of cancer but Jesus even healed her failing vision, so that she no longer needed glasses!

I found out that many pastors and ministers from the surrounding area had been to her place, wanting to pray for her, but they all wanted to be in her will so that they could get hold of that facility when she died. When we went back to see her six months later, she was the picture of health and vitality. But she had a question for me. She said, "How is it that the pastor of the largest church in our area can come up here to pray for my cancer, go home, come down with it himself, and die six months later?"

I had no answer until I was telling our friends from Alaska about what happened with her and then mentioned the warning God gave me years ago. The light finally came on! Pastor Megachurch, who went up to pray for this sister with an ulterior motive, was a victim of the Gehazi effect!

When Elisha's servant ran after Naaman to get the gifts that Elisha refused after the Syrian was healed, Gehazi got Naaman's leprosy and had it until he died. The same thing happened here with cancer. God is not playing games with our lust for the things of the world when we minister in His name using His gifts.

One other thing seems to apply. When we show ourselves faithful in that which is little, even more shall be given to us. But it all is curtailed when we seek temporal rewards instead of waiting on the Lord in His rest for our provision.

How is it we can seek the rewards that are of the world during this mere 70 years and put it up against an eternity of God's heavenly rewards?

I am afraid that my earnest appeal to these old friends fell on deaf ears. Will we heed Jesus' warnings or will we end up like Lot's wife?

In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. (Luke 17:31-33, NKJV).

Could Ownership Be Our Source of Trouble?

There is a curious observation made about the early church relating to ownership and the power it once had.

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayer. Fear came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together, and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need. Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 WEB)e

The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul. Not one of them claimed that anything of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. (Acts 4:32 WEB)

This first century community of believers lived out, by the Spirit of God, the values of the kingdom and lived the words of Jesus, "Sell your possessions." Jesus left

everything He owned, His trade, and His family to be about His Father's business. He left all privileges and gave up all possessions. When asked where He was staying, he answered, "[The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.](#)"(Matthew 8:20 WEB) Jesus was a homeless person. The believers were of one heart and soul, and because of this oneness, none of them clung to their possessions. Instead, they viewed them as belonging to the entire body of believers and God Himself. Constant watchfulness was required to preserve this heavenly economy, protecting it from the greed of Cain.

God was very serious about this, so serious that he struck one couple dead over it (see Acts 5:1-11). Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, sold a piece of land, but they kept back part of the price. Ananias brought the rest and laid it at the apostles' feet. Peter said to him, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While you kept it, didn't it remain your own? After it was sold, wasn't it in your power? How is it that you have conceived this thing in your heart? You haven't lied to men, but to God." The Greek word for lied here is *pseudomai*. There is no record of Ananias saying anything to Peter or to anyone. Ananias was bringing the good business sense of Cain to the early Church and God would not tolerate it. He and his wife Sapphira were pseudo or false in their intentions. Their actions were designed to deceive and mislead others to believe that they had given all while they were hiding a wedge of gold in their tent. As a result they fell down dead and the young men came and carried them out and buried them. We cannot find anywhere in the New Testament where anyone else was struck dead by the Holy Spirit for lying.

Why did God take this incident so seriously? We know from Peter's own words that Ananias and Sapphira could have kept it all for themselves, but they could not keep half under pretense. God obviously detests those who live a lie in this area. He would have us hot or cold, going all the way or not at all. He wants us flat out as servants in His kingdom or totally in the world. Although Ananias and Sapphira may have thought they were deceiving Peter and the saints, they were lying to the Holy Spirit. They were being false and acting inconsistent to the Spirit of Truth that brought the love of God that manifested itself in great overflowing generosity. God would not allow the corruption that brought judgment on the descendants of Cain and the citizens of Sodom to take root in His fledgling Church.

Obviously God wanted to drive this point home and it worked! "Great fear came on the whole assembly, and on all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11). Later in a Samaritan village a man named Simon who had practiced sorcery came to Christ by the ministry of Philip. When he saw that the Holy Spirit was given to the new converts by the laying on of the hands of Peter and John, he offered to buy the gift so he too could give this power by the laying on of his hands. To this Peter replied, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Merchandising here is seen as a bitter poison that was trying to make its inroads into the infant church. It is evident that Satan finally succeeded once the first apostles were gone. Today, it is accepted practice to hold great conferences for large sums of money, where the attendees are told that modern "apostles and prophets" will lay on hands and impart spiritual gifts and ministries. How is this any different than the sin of Simon? Does a true minister of God buy his gift, and make gain from selling it? Does he even own this gift that he has been made steward of? Not if we read the parables of Christ concerning stewardship correctly. A dear brother who prefers to remain anonymous recently wrote with rare insight.

The present world-system is based in a conceptual framework where owning represents investment of our life, our time, our name, our character, or any other aspect of our being, for the sake of control over the thing owned. It is difficult to realize the depth of devastation this has brought to humanity, but every historical record that presently exists attests to the visible devastation wrought in wars of conquest and subjugation of peoples for the sake of ownership.

If we own something, we have something to trade for other things to own, which takes us further down the path of investing our soul in merchandise. This concept of ownership and its follow-on, merchandising, is what separates us from God and our fellow man. The ultimate deception is that we own our own soul, our being, which is really just on loan from God the Creator of all. Satan thought he owned something that could make him greater than God--his gifts, his glory, his being--whatever it was that caused

him to be uplifted in the pride that finally destroyed him, he thought he owned it. The final straw was when he claimed a naïve humanity as his own to dominate and control as his slaves.

If we look at the kingdom of God from the viewpoint of what is revealed in the scriptures, we see an entirely different model being portrayed. God owns everything and if we need something, all we have to do is ask for it, based on our relationship to Him. In the parable of the prodigal son, when the prodigal's return was celebrated by the Father, the son who had stayed home was told, "All that I have is yours." When Paul was instructing the saints at Corinth, he said, "All things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:22-23 NKJV). What is mine that God didn't give me? And what may I take with me when I leave this world of form?

"God set up the kingdom of Israel to showcase His ways to the nations., and in the statutes and ordinances provided that the land could not be sold in perpetuity, debt must be retired every seven years, slaves were to be freed at jubilee, and so forth. Ownership had limits for the sake of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the powerless. Although not equal to the kingdom of God, and only a compromise with what we think of as real-world realities, these things provide an insight into God's ideas about ownership. The kingdom of Israel could not survive the idolatry of man, however, and God's ways were sidestepped and ignored."

Here again we see the meaning of God's word to Lucifer, "By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within" (Ezekiel 28:16). The movement of God's Spirit brings believers into a state of great love and generosity, leading to righteousness, peace and joy. The movement of Satan and his hordes is toward individualism, merchandising and violence. The Holy Spirit is at enmity with the social injustice, war, violence and bloodshed of mammon, yet in the same gathering where the Spirit of generosity is stirred in the saints of God, there are people who take advantage and lust after gain in His name. What are the implications of all this? Should we have nothing to do with mammon whatsoever? When looking at the teachings of Jesus on this matter, one thing becomes very clear. Nearly all His teachings on money were negative.

You cannot read far in the Gospels before you realize that Jesus viewed money as filthy and unrighteous. Jesus approached the subject of money with unnerving indifference. He really had no time for it. In the one parable where the unjust steward was commended about his use of unrighteous mammon, it was because he used it to lessen the burden of debt that others were under, not because he used it for his own worldly gain. The only correct use of unrighteous mammon of this world is to break every yoke and let the oppressed go free.

We are not advocating that anyone should presumptuously go out and establish communities and start having all things in common. What happened in the book of Acts cannot be contrived by implementing certain methods and life styles, but is the fruit of the Spirit of God being poured out on those who are willing to die to their self centered ways and be filled with His love. We need a personal visitation from heaven that will make the things of earth grow strangely dim. We desperately need the Spirit of God to birth an expression of His Kingdom once again. What we see around us today is not God's kingdom!

In 1970, I, Michael, went to a Jesus People park-meeting and God visited me there in a life changing way. As a result I was filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time after a thoroughly purging time of repentance. At this same time a local county-rock band named the Wilson-McKinley came to the Lord in these meetings where their peers ministered to them. As a result of their conversion, they totally threw themselves on Jesus and forsook their former life-style of drugs, sex and rock and roll.

There was another man I will call Bob who came on the scene at that time. Bob was an older Christian who had a background in marketing and was quite the Bible teacher. We all were impressed with his knowledge of the scriptures and his personal charisma gave him great leverage over us in a short time. When Bob found out that he had a rock band on his hands, it wasn't long before he rebuked them for hocking all their instruments and "wasting their time" witnessing on the streets to the lost youth of our town. They could have been doing it in grand style from the stage.

It was not long before a hasty first album was recorded with a hand held cassette machine at one of their live gigs and the die was cast. Marketing this group became the goal, as they were booked with their new Jesus songs to play all over the U.S.

and parts of Canada. More albums followed and Bob finally conformed them into the image of what he wanted. Trouble was, the Holy Spirit in them was totally quenched and they had lost all their former appeal as simple saints who just loved Jesus and wanted to serve Him with all their hearts.

This is so typical of what caused the decline of the Jesus Revolution of the early 70s. Men found a way to harness and market the energy and talents of these young people and build churches and businesses out of them. What once was a move of the Spirit that converted thousands of street kids to Christ and all but shut down the drug industry in many cities in the U. S., became another spirit-numbing commercial venture of businessman and clerics alike. The resulting abuse of these young believers caused many to turn and fall away from their faith. Once again the woman with a crown of twelve stars (see Revelation 12) gave birth into the mouth of the Great Red Dragon. A move of God that was turning the world upside down for Jesus was quenched by greed.

Jesus' Attitude Toward Money and Worldly Gain

Christians everywhere agree (in principle at least) that the example and teachings of Jesus are the ultimate authority in all things having to do with the kingdom of God. He always did the things He saw the Father doing and spoke the things He heard the Father saying. His doctrine was not His own. To see Jesus was to see the Father and to hear Him was to hear the Father. This makes the words of Christ the supreme authority on all matters. We are exhorted to have the mind of Christ in all things. If we are to take this to its ultimate conclusion, Christ's attitude toward money should also be our attitude.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7, Luke 12) is rightly referred to by theologians as "the preamble of the kingdom." Jesus introduced basic kingdom concepts to the poor. You do not have to read far to realize that this kingdom and its economy are not of this world. In fact, nearly everything that Jesus taught about money is considered irresponsible in today's society. Anyone who dares to obey Christ's teaching in this matter may be accused of having his head in the clouds and of not being in touch with the realities of the current financial situation.

Men tend to measure their successes and failures by the time invested compared to the yield, always looking at the bottom line and the immediate returns. Jesus begins

by addressing this false standard of success, the matter of rewards, payment made in return for a service rendered. Even when giving to the needy, you can be seeking the reward of being known among men as a philanthropist or giving person. Let's listen in on the Master as He teaches the proper kingdom attitude toward money.

Be careful that you don't do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

Therefore when you do merciful deeds, don't sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most assuredly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you do merciful deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does, so that your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most assuredly, I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your inner chamber, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matthew 6:1-6,WEB)

Jesus continues, "In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him." The vain repetitions of the Gentiles were incessant requests for the material things of this life. They hoped that by repeating themselves and nagging, like a child begging for a treat in the supermarket, they could get all they desired. They were like Aladdin rubbing his magic lamp.

This doesn't work with the Living God. He is a Father who is well acquainted with the needs of His Children and cares for them. He knows what we need before we ask. The knowledge of His great love changes the way we approach Him. Rather than coming with incessant requests for things to consume on our own lusts, we come in faith, with open hands, trusting that Father knows best what is required for life and that He will give us our daily bread, as He determines that to be.

God is not a Father who spoils His children as some doting, wealthy parent who buys the affection of His children, but rather meets their needs from His riches in glory. So how do we approach our Father? Jesus counseled,

Pray like this: "Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen."

Jesus makes prayer a family matter. He reveals childlike trust in a Father who provides daily for His children in contrast to the vain repetition of pagan Gentiles, who were pleading with distant and indifferent gods who serve themselves. A good father is attentive to the needs of his children and is eager to meet them. The words, "Give us this day our daily bread" are perhaps the greatest statement of faith in the entire Bible. "Father, you know what we need today, and we trust you to provide it. You are our Father! We are your children. Give to us today those things that you determine to be our daily bread."

Jesus went on to show God's faithfulness and provision even to the least of His creation. How much more this holds true for His most beloved creation, man himself.

"See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they? Which of you, by being anxious, can add one cubit to the measure of his life? Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin, yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you of little faith? Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?' 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:26 -33)

Compare Luke's account.

"Consider the ravens: they don't sow, they don't reap, they have no warehouse or barn, and God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds! Which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his height? If then you aren't able to do even the least things, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if this is how God clothes the grass in the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith? Don't seek what you will eat or what you will drink; neither be anxious. For the nations of the world seek after all of these things, but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek God's Kingdom, and all these things will be added to you. Don't be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Sell that which you have, and give gifts to the needy. Make for yourselves purses which don't grow old, a treasure in the heavens that doesn't fail, where no thief approaches, neither moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
(Luke 12:24-34)

Notice that Jesus is not condoning any selfish prayers here. This is far from the self-centered prayers of the "Prosperity Movement." In the early 1970's Janis Joplin sang a song that became an open mockery of the self-centered TV evangelists and preachers of that time. We can still hear her gravelly voice as she sang,

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ?
My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends.

Then there was the song by Ray Stevens, "Would Jesus Wear a Rolex on His Television Show?"

Woke up this morning, turned on my TV set.
There in living color was something I can't forget.
This man was preachin' at me, yeah, laying on the charm.
Asking me for twenty with ten thousand on his arm.

He wore designer clothing and a big smile on his face,
Selling me salvation while they sang amazing grace.
Asking me for money when he had all the signs of wealth.
I almost wrote a check out, and then I asked myself,
Would He wear a pinky ring?
Would He drive a fancy car?
Would His wife wear furs and diamonds?
Would His dressing room have a star?
If He came back tomorrow, there's somethin' I'd like to know.
Would Jesus wear a Rolex on His television show?
Would Jesus be political if He came back to earth?
Have His second home in Palm Springs but try to hide His worth?
Take money from those poor folks when He comes back again?
And admit He's been talkin' to all those preachers that say they've been
talkin' to Him?

The world might not be spiritual, but they ain't stupid (Luke 16:8)!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cuts to the heart motivation behind man's preoccupation with reward.

Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Coveting the things of this world is deeply rooted in the heart of fallen man, and he truly believes that the one who dies with the most toys wins. This leads to the inequity of hoarding. It was in answer to this very ambition that led Jesus to teach as He did. In Luke 12:13-21 we discover the reason why Jesus taught on these things at that time.

One of the multitude came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

That sounds reasonable doesn't it? What was so wrong with this man's request? Shouldn't his brother have shared the inheritance with him? Shouldn't Jesus be concerned about fairness and equality? Jesus responded, "Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" Against this backdrop, He turned to the crowd and exclaimed, "Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses."

Speaking in a parable, Jesus went on to make the connection between covetousness and storing up wealth. "A certain rich man's land brought forth plentifully so he asked himself, 'What will I do, because I don't have room to store my crops?'" It never once entered his mind that the bumper yield might be God's blessing to the poor. No. His answer to the problem of surplus is the same as it is today. He said, "This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns, and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will tell my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.'" You can almost hear the indignation in Jesus' voice as He continues, "But God said to him, 'You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared--whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Often a man will plant a church and soon it grows beyond the size of the building they have been meeting in. Then they build a greater building to contain all the faithful. Does it ever occur to them that this might be a great time to decentralize and send the faithful out into the mission field, taking the gospel to the poor third world nations, fulfilling the great commission? This could be an opportunity to further the real kingdom built from living stones instead of squandering the money on a kingdom made of bricks, wood and stubble. Because of greed, they tear down their old barns and build bigger ones that they might get their increase under one roof, more money and a reputation for having the biggest church in town and the largest salary!

Our hearts will be where our treasures are. If we store up for ourselves, our hearts will be focused on this earth and our riches that are stored here. So how do we become rich toward God? We find the answer in Luke 12: 33-34:

Sell that which you have, and give gifts to the needy. Make for yourselves purses, which don't grow old; a treasure in the heavens that doesn't fail, where no thief approaches, neither moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

We become rich toward God by selling what we have and giving to the poor. There is no other way to exchange earthly currency into heavenly currency. These are not our teachings, but the teachings of our Lord.

God made our eyes in such a way that unless we are deformed, where one eye goes the other one follows. We cannot look at one thing with one eye and another thing with the other at the same time. This is singleness of eye and where the eye is single, the whole body is filled with light. Neither can we focus on God and money at the same time. One or the other will fill our eyes and our eyes will be good or evil as a result, filling the body with light or leaving it in darkness. Jesus explains,

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

"No one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon." (Matthew 6:22-24, RSV).

Both the Father and Mammon are referred to as masters. Both ceaselessly expand their kingdoms in their worshiper's hearts until they possess all affection, attention, and dominion. One is the rightful Lord of all. God the Father of spirits desires to reign within the souls of men, turning their affections to things that are eternal. The demonic force of Mammon appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16) and spawns a love for this present evil world system that is antichrist in its very nature.

For Jesus' warning to have any impact in our lives, we must further identify the master named Mammon. Mammon was the name of a Babylonian god. Worshipers gathered around and made offerings to him in hopes of getting worldly gain. Their focus was on the things of this world. The pursuit of success, fame, and wealth filled their attention. In short, they desired a kingdom for themselves that was totally of this world.

In contrast to this we see another kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world. This kingdom comes not with outward observation, and it was this kingdom that Jesus came representing, the kingdom of His Father. The currency of His kingdom is selfless love for others. You store treasures in heaven by selfless acts of love toward the needy. There is no compromise in this matter among those who are of His kingdom anymore than there was in His Son. These two kingdoms and their masters are diametrically opposed--love versus hate, devotion versus spite. Man cannot serve both; in choosing one he is rejecting the other.

Which of these masters do we serve? Which one holds the affections of our hearts and occupies our waking thoughts? Which one claims our time and energy? Is it God or mammon? Or are we foolishly trying to placate both of these masters in an endless effort to prove Jesus a liar?

Everywhere we look, men are seeking gain for their own kingdoms, all in the name of the Christ who spent a lifetime focused on the one eternal kingdom of His Father. Someone once quipped, "Keeping up with the Jones' is the act of buying things you don't need with money that you don't have to impress people you don't like."

If worldly gain is our goal, we will be proven the liar. Everywhere we look we see churchmen storing up treasures here on earth. They build large buildings, organizations, bank accounts, 401K's and great mansions. They gather fine cars, expensive jet planes, and riches of every sort as if this world is the only reward they will ever have. Is this the life that was demonstrated by Jesus and His disciples as they laid down their lives in devotion to the Father and His kingdom? Is it the life of those who "dwelt in caves, wearing the skins of animals, of whom the world was not worthy"?

In Sedgwick County, Kansas, where Wichita is located, nearly \$100 was spent on new church buildings and renovation for every man woman and child in the county,

or almost \$40 million in a single year! Search your county records and you are very likely to find such wanton waste as this, while the poor and needy go begging. Here in our county, Children's Village, an emergency shelter for youth, was forced to turn away needy children while just around the corner a new million dollar church was being built "for the glory of God." What an affront to the gospel of the true and Living God!

So How Are WE to Live?

Jesus was born to a poor Jewish couple in a barn and laid in a feeding trough. He spent his first thirty years working for his stepfather as a lowly carpenter in a back woods town in Galilee. He once said to a follower, "The birds of the air have nests and foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." He rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey and went into the temple to turn over the moneychanger's tables, accusing the Jewish leaders of making His Father's house into a den of thieves. He died a criminal's death because of His stand for the kingdom of God and His body then was laid in a borrowed grave. What a contrast to many of those who claim to represent Him today! Have they never read His word, "A servant is not greater than his Master"?

After making the definitive statement, "You can't serve both God and Mammon," Jesus went on to describe how we should live if we truly believe in Him as Lord.

Therefore (because of this) I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? (Matthew 6:25)

Our heart's focus determines what kingdom we are truly of. The god that occupies the largest space is the one we worship and serve. As one teacher once pointed out, "You are what you believe." If our time is spent thinking about our lives, what we shall eat and what we shall wear, wanting a bigger and better house, its furnishings and car, we are worshipping Mammon.

The Attitude of the Apostles and Early Believers Toward Money

Jesus taught His disciples the dangers of serving Mammon, a lesson that they learned well and handed down to the early believers. The first century ekklesia also viewed the love of money as the root of all evil and were wary of its corrupting influences. For this reason, leaders in the body of Christ cannot be focused on Mammon (Titus 1:7, 1 Timothy 3:3). Evidently, this lust for gain was a major concern of the apostles. Paul wrote that servants (deacons) among the ekklesia of God were to be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre (1 Timothy 3:8). Peter wrote to fellow elders, "[Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind](#)" (1 Peter 5:2).

We hear a lot today about the qualifications for leadership. An elder must be the husband of one wife, of good reputation, not a fighter or drunkard and so forth, but one quality is rarely mentioned in today's church sermonizing. Godly leaders must not be greedy of filthy lucre. This seems to make no sense at all in the present day religious setting here in America. The pursuit of happiness has become synonymous with the pursuit of wealth. Personal wealth has been made a measurement of godliness in some American Churches. They reason, "If you have faith you will prosper financially. God wants to bless His children. After all, aren't we the King's kids?"

Christian or not, if you have been raised in America you have been taught to focus on mammon from your youth. When I, Michael, was in grade school, my little cousin whose father was a banker often wrote me letters and would always sign off with the words, "Save your money!" We have been taught to pursue the American dream, i.e., apple pie, a large house filled with fine furnishings and garish distractions, a two plus-car garage with a Chevrolet in each bay and another building just to hold our snow mobiles, ATV's, personal water craft and such like. Then there are the 401K and investments to insure that all these things endure during your retirement years. (Will somebody please show us where God's people retire in the New Testament church?). Unless you are the exception, your whole life has been spent pursuing and upgrading these things. If this is not being greedy of filthy lucre, what is? When he has found the woman of his dreams, a young man pursues his love with everything he has. When your whole life is spent in the pursuit and maintenance of worldly gain, is it not the object of your love? Jesus' words should

ring in our ears, "I say unto you, you have had your reward." But no, this is not the case, for our church leaders are modeling this very life style that the people of the world lust after.

Paul accused the circumcision party of the Jews, who tried to subvert the faith of the new Gentile believers, of teaching perverse things to cloak and justify their lust for filthy lucre. "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:10-11).

Paul further exposed this deception in 1Timothy 6:4-12.

"He is conceited, knowing nothing, but obsessed with arguments, disputes, and word battles, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, constant friction of people of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. Withdraw yourself from such. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly can't carry anything out. But having food and clothing, we will be content with that. But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you confessed the good confession in the sight of many witnesses."

We have no record of Paul, Peter, James or John charging for their epistles or ministry to the saints of God. Their letters (we call them books) were distributed freely. They were not like those in high profile ministries today who take their inspiration and market it to make worldly gain. Rather, these early apostles followed the admonition of Jesus, "Freely you have received, freely give."

Did the Early Apostles Try to Make a Living From Preaching the Gospel?

Everywhere we go, we hear ministers justifying their lust for gain and fleecing the flock of God. What was the attitude of the early leaders who lead the people of God by the example they saw in Jesus? Consider their own words:

. . .and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. (1 Corinthians 7:31, NKJV).

I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:33-35 NKJV).

To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. (1 Corinthians 4:11-13, NKJV).

If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:12, NKJV).

What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:18, NKJV).

Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? (2 Corinthians 11:7, NKJV)

And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. (2 Corinthians 11:9, NKJV).

Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought

not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. (2 Corinthians 12:14, NKJV).

Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps? (2 Corinthians 12:17, 18, NKJV).

Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. (1 Thessalonians 2:6, NKJV).

For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 10, NKJV).

But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing." (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, NKJV).

. . .nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:8-12, NKJV).

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. . .and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the

synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:1-4, NKJV).

Here we see that Paul commands those who labor in the work of the gospel to work with their own hands and support themselves just as he did. Not only that, they were to meet the needs of those who were weak and could not help themselves. Paul was speaking to those who ministered, the elders, when he said, "It is more blessed to give than receive." When was the last time you saw this attitude among the leaders of today's churches? Probably never. Instead, these false leaders use verses like this one against their own congregations. Why is it that Jesus' words, "Give and it shall be given unto you, heaped up, well shaken together, running over" never affects their generosity toward the poor, the widows and the orphans? Why is it that "a laborer is worthy of his hire" never applies to the little old sister who spent her life in the church Sunday school teaching the kids? Funny how the church benevolence fund is always barer than Mother Hubbard's cupboard, but the war chest for the next church building expansion is rarely empty.

Paul was sensitive about being an affront to the gospel and avoided begging for money. The most common accusation against churches today by those outside is, "All they want is your money!" From what we have seen, this criticism is well earned. Paul wrote, "[We] endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ." Is this the attitude we see among our carnal leaders who are more concerned with money and prestige than furthering a kingdom that is not made with slime and bricks? No, rather it was of these builders whom Paul wrote, "whose god is their bellies." Remember, Isaiah prophesied that it was the builders who rejected God's chosen Cornerstone. Is it any wonder that they are building the wrong temple?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:17, NKJV).

Theyers defines peddling (kapeleuo) as

- 1) to be a retailer, to peddle,
- 2) to make money by selling anything,

- 3) to get sordid gain by dealing in anything, to do a thing for base gain,
- 4) to trade in the word of God,
- 5) to try to get base gain by teaching divine truth.

Paul was careful not to abuse the authority given him by God or use it for his own gain and well being. He preached the gospel without charge. He was a burden to no one, yet today men demand the tithe of widows and the poor who are barely making it. They are not the least afraid of being a burden to them. Paul believed that his spiritual children should not save up for the parents, but that the spiritual parents should be the ones who should be "storing up" for the children.

Paul was not the only one who had this attitude toward the ministry of the gospel and seeking gain. Consider these words of the apostle John.

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. (3 John 1:5-7)

So What Did Jesus and the Apostles Teach?

We know that Jesus did not come to be served, but He came as a Servant of all, laying down His life as a ransom for many. He is the Pattern Son of God and He taught by example. Though people followed Him by the thousands on more than one occasion, He never took up an offering. Instead, he said to His disciples, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." They had twelve baskets. Just think of the offering the disciples could have taken up with a crowd like that. No, instead of taking up an offering, He fed them.

Today it is an unquestioned policy among the churches to send a young missionary out to plead before a number of congregations and drum up support. He is not sent out to the mission field until he has a guaranteed income that will more than meet

his needs in the foreign land. He expects to live in a modicum of comfort with his family, normally far above the standard of living of those to whom he is sent. The native peoples see that the missionary is not required to live by faith as they have to. When the going gets rough, these teachers of the gospel can always pick up the phone and get another infusion of money from the folks back home.

When training His disciples, Jesus sent them out two by two. He sent them out with no guaranteed support, and commanded them to leave everything behind that men normally relied on when they traveled. After giving them power over unclean spirits and diseases, He commanded them to take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse. They were to wear sandals, and not put on two tunics. Jesus stripped them of every prop except their dependence on God Himself. They were to freely give to the needs of the people from the miraculous supply of God and not ask for anything in return. The only gift they were to expect from those who received them was food, and even then they were to eat what was set before them without question.

Matthew's record makes this very clear. "Take no bag for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the laborer is worthy of his food" (Matthew 10:10). Jesus did not say the laborer is worthy of large sums of money. Luke tells us what the wage of these laborers was.

Into whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace be to this house." If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in that same house, eating and drinking the things they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Don't go from house to house. Into whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat the things that are set before you. Heal the sick who are therein, and tell them, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." (Luke 10: 5-9).

All that these laborers expected to receive was enough food to sustain their strength until they reached their next destination. Being received and being fed were synonymous. They were not even to take their outer tunic, which was their quilt in the event that they had to sleep along the road. God would feed them. He would keep them warm. They were made utterly vulnerable and dependent on heaven for sustenance. Jesus gave these instructions, "Wherever you enter into a

house, stay there until you depart from there. Whoever will not receive you nor hear you, as you depart from there, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony against them. Assuredly, I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" They did as the Lord commanded, and the results amazed all of them. They cast out many demons, and anointed many who were sick, and healed them (see Mark 6:8-13). Elsewhere Jesus said, "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward: and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most assuredly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward" (Matthew 10:41).

The word *receive* here is very important. It is God's will for His itinerant apostles and prophets to be taken into worthy homes and stay there only for a short time, do the work of the gospel and then move on. The thought they should be given large sums of money to further their ministry was unheard of. The only offerings that they ever collected were for the poor and needy, not exalted ministers. On the contrary, the apostle John commended certain men "because for the sake of the Name they went out, taking nothing from the Gentiles" (3 John 1:7).

Because of their sacrifice John concluded, "We therefore ought to receive such, that we may be fellow workers for the truth." He did not say, "We ought to support them financially." He did not say, "We ought to give large sums of money to their ministries." No. He encouraged the saints to receive such into their hearts and homes and sit them at their tables.

In contrast to this there was one named Diotrephes, who loved to be first among the brethren. He was threatened by the sacrifice and humility of these lowly servants of Christ and would not receive them or allow others to do so. Of this self exalted one John went on to write,

Therefore, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words. Not content with this, neither does he himself receive the brothers, and those who would, he forbids and throws out of the assembly. Beloved, don't imitate that which is evil, but that which is good. He

who does good is of God. He who does evil hasn't seen God. (See 3 John 9-11)

The early church practiced the example set forth by Jesus for many years. The Didache which is considered to be one of the oldest Christian documents apart from the Bible (~70 CE), reveals that, although they were beginning to be affected by Greek philosophy and paganism, the late first century church retained something of Christ's mindset toward money.

He (every apostle who comes unto you) will remain one day, and if it be necessary, a second; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And let the apostle when departing take nothing but bread until he arrive at his resting-place; but if he ask for money, he is a false prophet (11:5-6)

If this was the accepted teaching of today, it would certainly weed out the hirelings. How many ministers would there be if this practice were still in effect? How would the early Christians judge the "apostles" of our day, who not only ask for money but charge large sums to attend their conferences? And what of the "prophets" who not only charge to get into their conferences, but run after the error of Balaam, prophesying for profit, charging considerable sums for "personal prophesies"? How would these fare if the early believers were to set in judgment of them?

Perhaps a more telling question might be, "Are we willing to live on bread in order to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ?" Did Jesus pay the price and live in poverty so that the apostles and believers that followed didn't have to? Did they live lives of ease and opulence leave a legacy of established kingdoms in this world? Did they build great institutions, naming great churches, universities and seminaries after themselves as is the practice today? Let Paul's words suffice:

But sometimes I think God has put us apostles on display, like prisoners of war at the end of a victor's parade, condemned to die. We have become a spectacle to the entire world--to people and angels alike. Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you are so wise! We are weak, but you are so powerful! You are well thought of, but we are laughed at. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, without enough clothes to keep us warm. We have endured many beatings, and we have no homes of our own. We have worked wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who

curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. We respond gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash--right up to the present moment. (1 Corinthians 4:9-13, NLT)

These men served the kingdom of God and cared nothing for worldly gain. They supported themselves and often went without. They had no homes of their own, much less any million dollar palaces. They heeded Jesus' words and did not seek to find their lives. They had tasted the heavenly gift and found it good. Their only legacy was to live and die just as their Forerunner, the very Son of God, promoting the eternal kingdom that comes without outward observation. They did not consider their service to be a vocation or livelihood but were witnesses (Greek *martus*), appointed unto death. It was not a living but a dying; a life laid down and never an excuse to gather wealth to themselves.

Beware of Fellows of the Baser Sort--Ministers of the Market Place

Don't be surprised if people that pursue mammon in the churches end up being your worst enemies. In Acts 17:5 we read, "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people."

Theyers defines baser sort (*agoraios*) as follows:

- 1) Of or belonging to the market place
- 2) frequenting the market place
- 3) hucksters, petty traffickers, retail dealers
- 4) idlers, loungers, the common sort, low, mean vulgar
- 5 generally, proper to the assembly, suited to forensic speaking, business-like transactions.

The hucksters, merchants, and the retailers who were involved in business-like transactions persecuted Paul. This should show us just how antichrist this spirit of

Mammon really is. It was the silversmiths who sold statues of Diana in Ephesus that caused the riot that almost got Paul and those with him killed.

One of the latest excuses for pursuing this world's wealth in the name of Christ is, "I am a minister of the market place." We hear this parroted all over the country. This greed has even found its way into the house church movement. The House 2 House conference in Austin this month costs \$100 per head plus meals, travel and motel rooms. And get this, it is on "Market Place Ministry." The following is a quote from the House 2 House E-Newsletter of January 5, 2004, entitled, you guessed it, "Marketplace Ministry." 5

"If more Christians realized that they were anointed for business, God's Kingdom would come faster to this earth." (Laurie Beth Jones)

Show us that one in the scriptures! Here is another ridiculous quote from this publication.

"I believe that societal transformation is high on God's agenda for this generation and that the chief catalytic force to bring it about will be Christian believers ministering in the marketplace." (C. Peter Wagner)

The two ministries quoted in the House 2 House Newsletter are into marketing and selling their writings and other wares to the people of God. Have you ever examined C. Peter Wagner and Laurie Beth Jones and their ministries? Yes, it is true, they are ministers of the marketplace and they are making a killing at it while they minister marketplace thinking to the saints of God.

Wagner has gone on to invent apostles of every sort. He has taken posturing to new heights, even assuming the title "presiding apostle." On Wagner's market place web site, which he calls "The Arsenal," you can buy statuettes of comforter angels, defender angels, exalter angels, protector angels, provider angels, reaper angels, and last but not least, guardian angels for the low, low price of \$236 each. What did the early church ever do to witness of the kingdom of God without these little graven images? It is as if the silversmiths of Ephesus have been reincarnated but this time they have found a more lucrative market—the making and selling Christian idols.

We find a classic attempt to justify this Christian market-mania in the following promo to Ed Silvoso's book entitled *Anointed for Business*. The book is promoted by C. Peter Wagner. Pay careful attention to his bottom line logic.

Most of the leaders of the Early Church were community leaders and successful business people. The writing of the Gospels was entrusted to a medical doctor, a retired tax officer, a food supplier and the trustee of a family trust. Then there were tentmakers Priscilla and Aquila...food purveyors Peter, James and John...and Paul taught day and night while holding a full-time job. Of the 22 power encounters recorded in the book of Acts, all but one happened in the marketplace.

What conclusion is Mr. Silvoso's book leading up to here? He continues,

The heart of the city is the marketplace; yet the dichotomy between labor and religious service has done a great disservice to the advancement of the Kingdom of God. It's time to reconcile the dichotomy so that we can extend God's kingdom and transform our cities. The notion that labor for profit and worship of God are worlds apart is patently false. The heart of our cities is the marketplace. Yet the perceived wall between commercial pursuit and service to God continues to be a barrier to advancing His kingdom. Ed Silvoso invites all Christians in business to knock down the wall!

Let's see if we got this right. Because most of the early church leaders were successful business people prior to Christ's call, then it must stand true that the "wall between commercial pursuit and service to God" is a "barrier to advancing His kingdom." There is nothing sound or biblical about this conclusion.

Those early apostles were taught by Jesus to keep themselves disentangled from the affairs of this life, business or otherwise. They left their nets and followed Jesus. We forget that Peter's words, "I'm going fishing" are the words of a man who temporally lost sight of the kingdom, not one who was sent as an apostle of the marketplace. As a result of this momentary lapse in Peter's faith and vision, Jesus questioned where Peter's devotion really was. "Do you love me more than these, Peter? Do you love the full net more than me? Do you love the smell of the sea more than me? Do you love your job, your home, your wife and children more than me?" Paul made the point quite well in his letter to Timothy, "[You therefore, my son,](#)

be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:1-4, NASB).

Peter Wagner obviously takes exception to these words of Paul. He writes, "I believe there are Apostles of Finance, Technology, Medicine, Industry, Education, the Military, Government, Law, Communications, Business, Transportation, Nuclear Science, Agriculture and a hundred other segments of society. When these Marketplace Apostles begin to move into their rightful place under the powerful anointing of God - watch out! Revival will be right around the corner!"

Isn't this amazing! Jesus now has Apostles of finance! Wasn't that the job of Judas, who carried the moneybag and betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver? Could it be that he was just fulfilling his calling as an Apostle of Finance? And who would have ever thought that Nuclear Science was a ministry? Perhaps we could call it "Nuke 'em for Jesus." Well, silly us! How did we ever miss that one?

Our personal favorite is the apostle of education! Not only is cleanliness next to godliness (a quote from Ben Franklin, not the scriptures), but so is education. Therefore, the unforgivable sin must be ignorance. If there are apostles to represent all segments of society, then what about the apostles of ignorance? Aren't there ignorant people out there? If so, there must be apostles of ignorance. Were Peter and John, who were "unlearned and ignorant men" in the eyes of the educated Pharisees, apostles of ignorance?

You think that's ridiculous? Our point exactly! There were no Apostles of Finance, Technology, Medicine, Industry, Education, Military, Government, Law, Communications, Business, Transportation, Nuclear Science, Agriculture, etc. No! These men were apostles of Jesus Christ, not apostles of mammon or higher learning. Yes, they were unlearned and ignorant men, but the learned Pharisees "marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). The distinguishing mark on these men's lives was NOT education, not wealth nor worldly prestige and power. What made people stand up and take notice of them

was the fragrance of Jesus in their lives. They preached the kingdom with power, not men's wisdom. What do they say of you and me? Can those who witness our confession tell that we have been with Jesus?

Regardless of what they had been before they were called to Christ, the only business they conducted afterwards was the Father's Business, just like Jesus their example. They were too busy turning the world upside down to be concerned with representing every facet of society in this *kosmos* system.

Perhaps the most blatant attempt to lower Jesus to the standards of cooperate America is found in Laurie Beth Jones's book entitled *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*. The San Diego Union Tribune condensed Jones's book as follows:

"Jones presents Jesus not as a religious messiah but as an executive leader...a kind of how-to manual for succeeding as corporate officers--internally, externally, and for eternity."

This is one of the most blasphemous statements we have ever heard. But least you think that we are judging Jones too harshly, we should point out that she has written another book entitled *Jesus Entrepreneur*. In that book she suggests that "Jesus was the ultimate spiritreneur, because he gave up a comfortable living as a carpenter to pursue a new line of work that would really affect human lives." She seems obsessed with making the teachings of Jesus into sound business practice and making Jesus into a CEO entrepreneur.

It is an apostate society that strips Jesus of His divinity by bringing Him down to their level and re-creating Him after their own image and heart-felt lusts. It is not surprising that the American CEO brings Jesus down to his or her level. Jesus is not a CEO! He is the Son of the living God! We trivialize Him by using His name to sanctify our business endeavors, believing that somehow this makes it all right and holy. On the contrary, He desires to bring us up to His level and include us in His Father's business. God is not fooled by half-hearted surrender, nor is He impressed with our fancy rhetoric. He looks on the heart. He knows what master we serve. He knows if our hearts are after mammon or Him. We may fool others but we can never fool Him.

If you bother to go to the web pages of Wagner 6 and Jones 7 you will find paperback books that sell for twice the price of any regular secular bookstore. You will find conferences that cost the attendees upwards of \$350, and you will find all sorts of Jesus junk for sale in the name of ministry.

We are called to be servants and slaves, laying down our own lives totally for the work of the kingdom, preaching the good news without cost. What we usually call ministry in America is a far cry from the faith and walk of Paul and the other apostles. Here we find Christian ways to save our lives and avoid the cross of Christ, all in the name of ministry.

Down through the years, those who made the greatest impact for the Kingdom of God were not apostles of the marketplace, as these who promote marketplace ministry want you to believe, but those who forsook all and followed the Lord. It was those who forsook houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children and lands, for Christ's sake, who received the hundred fold blessing of God. We are not talking about money. They received everlasting life as their inheritance (see Matthew 19:29).

We do not have the knowledge or resources to list all these ministers of God's Kingdom, but we can mention a few. Francis of Assisi was a shining light in a dark place. He was the son of a wealthy Italian cloth merchant who left his rightful inheritance, even the clothes he was wearing and went outside the camp to minister to the poor with great love. He bore the reproach of Jesus.

Or how about Hudson Taylor, who went into inland China, obeying the call of God without any mission society support or backing? He opened that vast continent to the gospel. How about George Mueller, who served the poor and orphans of England? God commanded him not to make their needs known to men. He obeyed and those kids never missed a meal.

None of these faithful servants of Jesus Christ went forth as apostles of the marketplace. They did not entangle themselves with the affairs of this life. They left all that behind! "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). This is the real heart of the matter. We are finding "Christian" ways to save our lives. We Christianize our

ambitions, cloaking them in the language of piety, all the while keeping our lusts for the things of this world intact.

Yes, we should be witnesses of the kingdom of God wherever we go, but if we are finding a home in the marketplace so we can get gain, what kingdom are we giving witness to? Man will do anything to justify his pursuit of wealth, even making marketing into ministry.

Does anyone today minister in simplicity and truly believe that if they hear the Lord and obey Him, that He will make sure that their work and expenses are met without begging or charging a fee? It was not long ago that men of faith believed, "What God commissions, He underwrites." Is anyone, like Paul, afraid of bringing reproach on the gospel of Christ by seeking material gain in the name of Christ? Is there any integrity left among those who call themselves by His name in this generation? Are all defiled by greed? Is there anyone who preaches the gospel without charge?

Goodbye, house church movement! It appears that you are going the way of Cain and Balaam. You are being seduced by commercialized religion, and like Esau, are selling your birthright for a bowl of pottage.

Oxen Treading Out the Grain?

When we warn brothers of the dangers of pursuing worldly gain under the name of ministry, they often quote us the following passage in their own defense. "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain" (1 Timothy 5:18, NKJV). Let's look a little further at the analogy that Paul gave.

Imagine yourself as an ox in a yoke tied to a wooden beam and forced to trudge in circles all day, pulling a millstone as it crushes the grain. Is the ox mindful about storing up grain for himself by his efforts? Does he gather all of it he can for himself? Or rather, does he eat just enough to keep going in service to his master, gaining nothing more? If we look at the lives that Jesus, Paul and the other apostles lived—lives that were laid down in selfless service to God—the example of the ox starts taking on a proper perspective.

When Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world, that was exactly what He meant. When He and the Apostles died, leaving this world behind, the only legacy

they left was one of riches stored in Heaven, not here on earth. They lived to serve the Father. They were true spiritual oxen, grinding precious wheat for His garner, not for their own gain, but for the benefit of the saints and the Father's kingdom. If we were to make Paul's analogy apply to the leaders of today's church, the ox would have to eat all the grain or store it up in his own barn, and be the chief beneficiary of the grinding!

The Son of Perdition—Making Merchandise of Christ and His Saints

Paul wrote the following about the end of days, telling us the prevailing conditions just before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, NKJV)

To comprehend this passage of scripture we must first understand that in addition to their redemptive aspect, the life and works of Christ were prophetic, pointing to future events in the end-time body of Christ. Jesus told the apostles, "Those things which you have heard and seen in me, do." The lives of His saints are lived out in the same spirit of sacrifice, the same rejection, the same sufferings, but are lives filled with His resurrection power. Just as Jesus was betrayed by the son of perdition (Judas), so shall the end-time body of Christ be betrayed. But as surly as Christ's physical body rose in victory over death, His glorious spiritual body, the true saints of God will also rise in resurrection power as they deny themselves and follow Him.

But what of this betrayer, the man of sin that shall be revealed in the last days, of whom Paul prophesied and Judas was a prototype? First there was the Old Testament prophecy about the son of perdition, then came Judas the prototypical fulfillment of prophecy. Next, at the end of the age all that Judas typified as the son

of perdition, his lust and greed for wealth and power, will be revealed right in the temple or dwelling place of God.

How will this be revealed and what form will it take? The first mention of the son of perdition, as such, is found in Christ's prayer in John 17:12. "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that you gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." The prophecy in reference here is found in Zechariah's judgment against the shepherds of Judah (see Zechariah 11:3-17), who were making merchandise of the people of God. The flock was so mistreated that God called them "the flock of slaughter." And God said to Zechariah, "Feed the flock of the slaughter, those buying them kill them, and hold themselves not guilty. And those who sell them say, 'Blessed be God, for I am rich'; and their shepherds do not pity them."

When Zechariah took the staff called kindness and broke it as a sign that God was breaking His covenant with these cruel shepherds, "the poor of the flock who were watching knew that it was the Word of Jehovah."

What comes next seems almost out of place, for Zechariah, speaking under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, said, "If it is good, give My price; and if not, let it go." So they weighed My price thirty pieces of silver." Then God said to Zechariah, "Throw it to the potter, the magnificent price at which I was valued by them." Zechariah did as the Lord commanded and "took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of Jehovah." Is this the value we place on Jesus? Is this the magnificent price at which He is valued today? Is Jesus still being betrayed for thirty pieces of silver—mere Mammon? As we have seen what they have done to the least of these his brethren, the answer is painfully clear. His house has become a house of spiritual slaughter for the sake of the "shepherd's" gain. As though he were speaking to Judas himself, Zechariah continues, "Woe to the worthless shepherd who abandons the flock! The sword shall be on his arm and on his right eye; his arm shall be completely dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened" (verse 17).

Most of us know the story of how Judas betrayed our Lord with a kiss. But have we considered that Judas entered into a pact with ambitious religious rulers who were plotting the death of Christ? Judas went to the chief priests, and asked them, "What

will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" (See Matthew 26:14-15). They covenanted with Judas for the very price that God had called "My price—the magnificent price at which I was valued by them, thirty pieces of silver." While Jesus was praying in the garden as the rest of the disciples were sleeping, Judas was coming with a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent out by the chief priest and elders of the people. The sign of Judas was, "Whoever I kiss, he is the one. Seize him." As Judas approached Jesus, he said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, why are you here?" Jesus knew why Judas had come, but did Judas? He didn't at the moment, but he soon came to his senses. It was too late (see Mat 26:47-50). After the mob led Jesus away to Caiaphas the high priest, Judas had a moment of sanity, and Matthew records the rest of the story.

Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? You see to it." He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself. The chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, "It's not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood." They took counsel, and bought the potter's field with them, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field was called "The Field of Blood" to this day. Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, The price of him upon whom a price had been set, Whom some of the children of Israel priced, and they gave them for the potter's field, As the Lord commanded me. (Matthew 27:3-10)

This historic event gives us powerful insight into the characteristics of the end-time manifestation or revelation of the son of perdition. Mark this well! The son of perdition that betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver was not an enemy; he was one whom Jesus called friend. It is no coincidence that he held the moneybag and often dipped into it for his own use. He was among the chosen ones that walked, ate and sat at the feet of Jesus for three years. Yet he made a covenant with the killers of the Anointed One for a price, under the influence of the antichrist spirit.

As today's sons of perdition sell out the body of Christ for a price and make merchandise of the saints, scripture is once again fulfilled. Jesus said, "What you

have done to the least of these, my brethren, you have done unto me." Remember, this Great whore and her daughters trade "in the bodies and souls of men" (Revelation 18:13).

Hidden Rocky Reefs Among Us

Jude warned that this filthy spirit was already making inroads into the early Church, a harbinger of worse things to come.

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... 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. (Jude 1:4, 11, WEB).

Who were these men who crept in, these defilers that turned the grace of God into lasciviousness [unbridled lust], men that Jude likened to "the angels that kept not their first estate"? (1:6). Who were these men who were doing to the early Church what Cain had done to the antediluvian world, men whose corrupting influences were blemishes in their love feasts? Jude sheds further light as we read,

These are hidden rocky reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you, shepherds who without fear feed themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn leaves without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. (Jude 1: 12, WEB)

Ecclesiastical leaders have used this passage for centuries to subjugate God's people, identifying anyone that would not submit to their rule as rebellious, but it is really about them. It is about greedy shepherds, prophets and leaders who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness and in doing so, deny our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that Balaam was a prophet of God who sold out to the highest bidder and Cora was a leader of Israel. Like Judas, these are also sons of perdition who betray Jesus and His people for a price. "Have prophecy, will travel." They have set up their marketplace in the temple made of living stones and encourage others to do the same. How often have you seen a merchant use his church affiliation to make business contacts? We have lost count. Amway in the name of Jesus, anyone?

As we look around in Christendom today, what do we see? Something is being revealed. Do we see those who share Christ's attitude toward mammon or do we see the lust for gain held by son of perdition? Do you see the son of perdition being revealed in the temple of God? Do you hear the sound of the moneychangers? Beware lest they make merchandise of you, and he who sells you says, "Blessed be God, for I am rich!" The worst thing of all is the reproach that such money-grubbers bring on the gospel. Because of these charlatans the way of truth is maligned.

"Of Whom the Way of Truth Is Evil Spoken of"

Once it was common practice that when an elder sinned, he was rebuked before all, "that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20). Paul even rebuked the apostle Peter to his face for his hypocrisy among the Gentile believers, then wrote about it to the churches. All was done in the Light and those who loved the Light came to it "that their works may be revealed, that they have been done in God" (John 3:21).

We normally are very careful not to mention names when addressing the failings of today's religious system but the world is not so gracious. In fact the world is eager to find the scoop on the failings and abuses in Christian ministries today, failings which are all too easy to find. Don't they have a right to judge us? We claim we have what they need, so don't they have a right to critique the goods—to examine the fruit this tree is producing before they take a bite? Whether we like it or not, that is exactly what they are doing. Lately Christendom has been weighed in the scales and found wanting. The behavior of certain Christian leaders has served as an occasion to blaspheme the gospel. Jesus warned that when the salt has lost its savor it is fit for nothing but to be trodden under the feet of men. The visible church has lost its saltiness.

Recently, an article entitled "Scam cost churches, parishioners \$160 million, officials say" appeared in the Sacramento Bee. The author was Stephen Magagnini. We have taken the liberty to share a few excerpts with you as a point of teaching.

Several Northern California pastors, including Sacramento's Assemblies of God leader Glen Cole, are among hundreds of evangelical Christians who

have been bilked out of \$160 million in a brazen Ponzi scheme, federal authorities said.

The organization of 440 churches that Cole leads, the Assemblies of God District Council of Northern California and Nevada, lost \$3.5 million in the scheme, an SEC official said Friday...The scheme, which began in mid-2000, has taken in at least \$160 million from as many as 29 churches and hundreds of individual investors, said Spencer Barash, head of enforcement for the SEC's (Securities and Exchange Commission) Fort Worth, Texas, office.

Setser, [the con man now in custody]—trading on his connections with renowned Anaheim evangelist Ralph Wilkerson—"was often given the privilege of participating in religious presentations and crusades and even at times got to speak from the pulpit, which elevated his stature," Barasch said. Barasch said the victims included several California churches.

The Assemblies of God District Council of Northern California and Nevada invested \$7 million, Barasch said. "They got about \$3.5 million back in Ponzi payments from later investors...

Juleen Turnage, director of public relations for the Assemblies of God national headquarters in Springfield, Mo., said in a statement: 'We know nothing about this matter. It's strictly a district matter, and you'd have to speak with Glen Cole at the California district office.'...' [Author's note: in the spirit of this hour and the example of the former Clinton Administration, "The buck never stops here. We must have our 'cut-outs]Cole, superintendent for the church's Northern California and Nevada district, admitted he'd been taken.

'I'm afraid so,' he said. 'I think he [Setser the con man] was at one time an evangelist, a Christian minister...' "One retired Sacramento pastor said he invested \$20,000 in IPIC two months ago. The pastor, who asked to remain anonymous because he was embarrassed he'd been "ripped off," said he was at a meeting of the district's pastors when IPIC came up. "I know Glen Cole thought he had really looked it through and it was very legitimate," said the pastor. "It sounded like they were actually buying products and shipping them. I was told (by an IPIC representative) there was a 100 percent markup and you would get 50 percent and the company would get 50 percent."

The pastor said he was told he would start seeing the money within 90 days.

'The Bible teaches that God delights in the prosperity of his servants, but it also teaches us not to love wealth, and it certainly teaches against greed,' he said.

So-called 'affinity schemes' targeting religious groups 'have happened before,' he said. 'You'd think we would learn.'" [words in brackets are our comments]

The term "affinity schemes" used by this embarrassed pastor who had been enticed and bilked out of \$20,000 especially got our attention. Its definition is the heart reason why these ministers were so susceptible to the wiles of this con man in the first place. The definition of the word affinity is "a close connection marked by a community of interests or similarity in nature or character, inherent resemblance between persons or things, a natural or instinctive mutual attraction, feeling of kinship."

Jesus said, "...the prince of the world comes, and he has nothing in me" (John 14:30). There was no affinity between Jesus and the prince of this world, no kinship. The world's wealth and power were not attractive to Him. He had already proven this during His temptation in the wilderness. There was nothing in Him that would make Him vulnerable to a con. It is obvious that this is not the case with many that claim to be His representatives in the church today. When the prince of this world comes, and he does, what does he find?

Before we blame it all on the devil, we should note that God uses the Tempter, Satan, to try the hearts of men. Jesus once said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired (exaiteomai – to acquire permission by asking) to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). There is little doubt in our minds that this latest affinity scheme was a sting, pulled off by Satan with God's permission. God is showing men and women in the church what is in their hearts. These could not have been tempted to buy into this scam if there had not been an instinctive mutual attraction between them and the enemy.

Here is another article, featured on the Atheist web site. Once again we see the words of Jude fulfilled, "of whom the way of truth is evil spoken of."

Misplaced Faith Stings Evangelists

By Al Lewis - Denver Post Business Columnist 9

If you pledge enough money to Greenwood Village-based Marilyn Hickey Ministries, you will receive a vial of oil.

It's not just any oil. Marilyn and her daughter, Sarah, have prayed over it with two more famous televangelists. There's even a photo of this ritual on the group's web site. [http://mhmin.org/donate/FCP03_2.htm]

"I asked Brother Oral Roberts and his son Richard to join Sarah and me in believing God to place a 'MIRACLE OVERFLOW' anointing into some special anointing oil," Marilyn Hickey explains on her web site. "NOW, the first thing we want to get into your hands is a personal quantity of this very special anointing oil."

Running a television, publishing, teaching, preaching and missionary empire is expensive. And sometimes even the creator of the entire universe may seem a little short on cash. Recall that in 1987, Oral Roberts said God would "take me home" if he did not raise \$8 million.

Like Roberts, Hickey pursues a relentless campaign for dollars. Two years ago, this quest led her to a man named Gregory Earl Setser, 47, a businessman in Texas who turned out to be quite a fundraiser himself. He claimed he was a former minister and promised miraculous investment returns without risking principal.

Last week, Setser was in federal custody, charged with fraud. He was unavailable for comment.

Hickey, through a spokesman, declined to comment. The ministry issued statements explaining how it invested with Setser, an alleged Ponzi scheme artist who prosecutors say duped several high-profile evangelical ministries and their members out of \$160 million.

"During the downturn in the economy, the board was looking for investment opportunities and vehicles with greater return to increase revenues for the work God has given us to do," the [Hickey] group said.

Setser had received high recommendations from Christian leaders, Hickey's ministry said. Other televangelists - including the faith-healing Benny Hinn of

Irving, Texas - believed in him, too. Hickey Ministries says it spent months investigating Setser, his companies and his claims.

Somehow, Hickey's group did not learn that in 1993 Setser received probation after pleading no contest to charges of theft by check in Texas. Or that he filed for bankruptcy that year after the Feds put a tax lien on him. Or that in 1997, his bankruptcy petition was dismissed for failure to make payments. In March 2002, Setser's firm, IPIC Investments, forfeited its status as a Texas domestic corporation for not paying taxes...

Hickey's prepared statements make several points: 1) Unlike others, the ministry made a "substantial profit" from its investment. 2) Pastors Wallace and Marilyn Hickey invested personally - no mention as to what was lost or gained. 3) Ministry board members invested, but did not promote the schemes to the congregation. 4) The ministry has played a role in helping prosecutors pursue Setser, and is a victim of his crime. "We pray that the name of Christ will not be tarnished as a result of this tragic situation," the ministry said.

Here again the atheists had all the proof they need that there is no God. It is obvious that the lust for mammon with ministries such as these is a driving force that outweighs their desire "that the name of Christ will not be tarnished." These "ministers" are tools in the hands of Satan, used to turn a lost word away from the glorious truth of the gospel of Jesus. Paul inadvertently prophesied about these when he spoke of himself as enduring "all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."

Last, but certainly not least, we have Oral Roberts. In 1977 Oral Roberts claimed that he received a vision in which God told him to build the City of Faith Medical Center. He claimed that a 900 foot tall Jesus told him that the City of Faith would be successful. The following excerpt is from a report in *O Timothy* magazine. 10

Tax records indicate that Oral's partners donated in excess of \$38,000,000 in the fiscal year 1977-78, "surpassing every other religious association in the nation." (p. 389)

In 1979 a book was published by Jerry Sholes, a former employee of Oral Robert ministries, which detailed deep deception and hypocrisy:

"Here is a portrait of the real Oral Roberts, the man not too many of his admirers know. He dresses in Brioni suits that cost \$500 to \$1000; walks in \$100 shoes; lives in a \$250,000 house in Tulsa and has a million dollar home in Palm Springs; wears diamond rings and solid gold bracelets employees 'airbrush' out of his publicity photos; drives \$25,000 automobiles which are replaced every 6 months; flies around the country in a \$2 million fan-jet falcon; has membership, as does his son Richard, in 'the most prestigious and elite country club in Tulsa,' the Southern Hills (the membership fee alone was \$18,000 for each, with \$130 monthly dues) and in 'the ultra-posh Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California' (both father and son joined when memberships were \$20,000 each—they are now \$25,000); and plays games of financial hanky-panky that have made him and his family members independently wealthy (millionaires) for life. (When his daughter and son-in-law were killed, they left a \$10 million estate!)" (Evangelist R.L. Sumner's review of Give Me that Prime-time Religion by Jerry Sholes)

By the mid-1980s, Oral Roberts had come to be the chief executive officer of an organization that employed about 2,300 people and did an annual business of about 110 million dollars, about 60 percent of which was raised through contributions." (p. 485)

In 1983 Oral said that Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him to find a cure for cancer. So far, he has not found a cure and it is certain that he never will.

In 1986 Oral said that God told him, "I want you to use the ORU medical school to put My medical presence in the earth. I want you to get this going in one year or I will call you home. It will cost \$8 million and I want you to believe you can raise it."

In January of 1987 Oral said that God told him that he had not sent out any medical missionaries from the City of Faith and He would take Oral home if he didn't raise the \$8 million by March of the same year. This money was to be used to provide full scholastic scholarships for medical missionaries who would be sent to other countries. Oral claimed that he had already raised \$3.5 million, but he needed \$4.5 million more by March 1, in order to get the full \$8 million and prevent God from taking him home. [Note: Shortly after this, bumper stickers with a dollar sign and the red not symbol imposed over it started appearing all over America. To the right of this emblem were the words, "Send Oral to heaven in '87." Again the name of Jesus

was being defamed in the eyes of the American public by a high profile minister with a lust for Mammon.]

In April Oral Roberts said that he had received \$9.1 million, which was \$1.1 million more than was required by God. In November of that very year, Oral Roberts announced that the City of Faith would be closing down. In January of The following year, 1988, Oral discontinued the medical scholarships. In March of 1988, the medical scholarship fund went bankrupt and those students that wanted to transfer to other colleges were told they would have to repay their scholarships to ORU at 18% interest.

In September of 1989, Oral closed the City of Faith, never having sent out a single medical missionary. And no, He didn't refund a single dime of the money that he bilked from the faithful. You do the math.

It Is Time to Repent!

You might be thinking that we have really had to dig to find such examples of men and women making merchandise of the people of God today. Bring up a good search engine like www.google.com and search the phrases "church fraud" or "church scams" and you will get an eyeful of graft and greed to be found among Christian churches.

One of the reasons that such charlatans are able to continue without rebuke is because of the cultic "no-speak" rule that has been adopted in Christendom today. We have been inundated with teachings about the evils of speaking negatively, especially of leaders. Consequently no one speaks out at all. Who does this protect, but those transgressors at the top? It is time to speak up! It is time to repent!

Those who console themselves by accusing us of being critical and bitter need to understand that we are as sure as we have ever been that this is a warning from the Lord. Moreover, we are equally sure that judgment is coming on church leaders who are making merchandise of God's people. The day shall reveal it!

You might be thinking that you are not part of the problem, but this warning is for you as well. These merchants will soon be howling because of their lost wages. But do you know that you are held accountable for your stewardship? Don't think that

you can blindly send off God's precious resources to any ministry and not be held accountable for how it ends up being spent. God might "own the cattle on a thousand hills and the wealth in every mine," but His problem has always been with those to whom He has given stewardship over such wealth. Jesus told many parables about our accountability in these matters, because we are all stewards of what belongs to God alone. We leave you with these words that Tertullian wrote to Fabius in the second century and hope you take them to heart.

"Keep pure for Christ His betrothed virgin; let no one make gain of her." (*De Fuga in Persecutione*)

Notes

(1) 9/17/03 issue

(2) <http://www.outreachmarketing.com/print/>

(3) <http://www.ascg.org>

(4) Charisma Online, "Pentecostal Minister Pleads Guilty To Robbing Bank," September 30, 2003 edition

(5) <http://www.house2house.tv/index.pl/emag/0004>

(6) <http://www.arsenalbooks.com/products.asp?dept=1024> See also these pages:
<http://www.arsenalbooks.com/products.asp?dept=1030>
<http://www.arsenalbooks.com/products.asp?dept=1024>
http://www.arsenalbooks.com/other_destination.asp

(7) <http://www.jesusceo.com/workshops/index.html>
<http://www.jesusceo.com/books.html> <http://www.jesusceo.com/jesusceo/index.html>
http://www.jesusceo.com/jesus_ent/index.html

(8) Sacramento Bee. (Published 2:15 a.m. PST Saturday, November 22, 2003)
(<http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/religion/story/7830205p-8770826c.html>)

(9)

<http://atheism.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.denverpost.com/Stories/0%2C1413%2C36%7E130%7E1783548%2C00.html>

(10) Volume 7, Issue 3, 1990. David W. Cloud, Editor.

Copyright © aWildernessVoice.com