

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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THE ODYSSEY

Part 2

The Counterfeits

By Rayola Kelley

Last month, I wrote about my peak in Christianity. It pointed to my salvation experience, being delivered from the pit of death, hopelessness, and despair. This month I am going to share with you what I refer to as my various detours in my Christian walk.

Those who know me, know that I was saved out of a cult. I wish I could say that I quickly learned about the implications of being part of a cult, but it took me almost 14 years to rid myself of every shred of the absurd indoctrination that cleverly takes one's mind captive when he or she has been exposed to the deceptive teachings of a counterfeit belief.

When I first recognized that what I had assumed was a genuine presentation of religion came from nothing but an antichrist premise that was designed to replace the true Jesus of the Bible, I became alarmed and fearful. The idea that I was on my way to hell because my family held to a heretical belief of God, salvation, and the Gospel was unnerving.

At times I felt I was on an emotional roller coaster ride. I was angry that I had been deceived. Any illusion I had about my family being



trustworthy in the religious path they had led me down, turned into feelings of disappointment and betrayal. The fact that the religion my family upheld as the right way to God had been passed down from generation to generation without being successfully challenged by truth, made me feel as if there was a bit of unfairness or injustice to it all. As a result, based

on my own salvation experience, I unwisely concluded that if they had heard the truth, they would not be on their present destructive path.

In spite of my immaturity, the struggle with reality and feelings made me realize that I just had to accept some facts. Sadly, it took a few years for me to recognize and accept each fact. The first fact I had to face was that my religion was wrong. Although there were some "good" moral aspects to it, it was still leading people to hell. In essence, it was rejecting the truth God had clearly set forth in His Word.

It was then that I realized because God and religion are attached to some belief does not make it right. The Apostle John in his first epistle reveals that there are three tests that every individual must pass to ensure their status as a child of God. Each test will reveal a different aspect about the person's spiritual condition. Like most cults, the cult I belonged to failed the first test. The test is simple and to the point, "Who do you say Jesus is?"

To get Jesus right there are four aspects to who He is that we must believe and know about Him. To downplay either point will identify the belief or person as being under an antichrist spirit. Those who are part of my discernment studies often have this drilled into them from every angle. They are: 1) Jesus is the Messiah, Anointed, Promised One from heaven (1 John 2:21-23); 2) He is God who came in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3); 3) He is the only Savior of the world (1 John 4:14); and 4) they must confess that He is the Son of God (1 John 4:15).

To confess that Jesus is the Son of God requires one to recognize His position as the only Messiah, believe that He has a dual nature of deity (is God) and humanity (as man now serves as our High Priest—1 Timothy 2:5), and He is the only one who can save us. In other words, it is not Jesus

plus some religious affiliation or good works that save us, it is Jesus alone who has provided the way of salvation through the redemptive work of the cross.

There are people who claim or believe some of the aspects of Jesus, but not every one of them. The reality is that the Jesus of the Bible is presented to us in a full package and must be received as so to ensure salvation. It is because of who He is He can save us to the uttermost. It takes unfeigned faith to believe every claim the Bible makes about Jesus and it must be assimilated as being truth if our attitude is going to properly align itself to Jesus as the only way to please God and to ensure we are a recipient of the life that has been promised to all who believe.

My cult failed to recognize Jesus in all four areas. Although, they used terminology that sounded acceptable, they had changed the intent of it. In other words, they changed the meaning of it; therefore, erecting another Jesus other than the one who is in the Bible. As Christians we need to look behind the veneer of pious images, religious cloaks, and vague terminology and find out what a person really believes, aware that a soul could be on the line.

The second test in 1 John is what I refer to as the relationship test. When I first got saved my goal was never to be led astray. I wanted to rid myself of the many religious assumptions planted by my family. This is where I had to admit that they were wrong! We all start out assuming our families are the smartest people on the block; however, if they are wrong, they are wrong!

I wanted to rage against them and ask "How could you lead me astray?" After all, upon such a discovery your family's intelligence can be called into great question. However, I had to realize they were deceived! Although some were quite sincere in their delusion, they were sincerely wrong. It was as I faced the deceptive cover my family was under, that I had to realize that unless their foundation was being shaken by God,

their vague Jesus unveiled as a fraud, and the convicting present of the Spirit was upon their life, they would see no need to examine or reconsider the validity of what they believed. They were indeed victims of Satan, blinded to the true light of the Gospel, and terribly lost to the truth of their own spiritual condition (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

It was then that I realized I must not assume something is true because someone I love, trust, admire, or respect says so. Therefore, my pursuit for Biblical knowledge hit a fervor. Granted, my pursuit sounded noble, but it was not the correct goal. Every Christians' goal should be the same: it should be to know the Person of Jesus. When one pursues knowledge about Jesus, they will simply end up possessing a lot of head facts about Him, but they will not have any heart revelation of who He is and needs to be.

As my studies brought a contrast between the real and the counterfeit, I had become aware that my cult had made everything about God a religious exercise. Most of what was being advocated by my former cult was establishing an outward light of a person's religious best. Clearly, there were some who were better at such outer reformation, but in all reality it was a false light. The one thing it lacked was reality. The truth of the matter is that behind our best, lurks the "old man," the epitome of the worse we are and can be when left unregenerate in our lost state. The truth of the Bible is the only sword that can finally strip one of his or her religious cloak, but the person must be ready to embrace it by faith as being a matter of truth.

Man's religion will cause one to be indifferent to the desire of God to have a personal relationship with each of us. When you are doing your religious best, your relationship with God is based on what you are doing, not on getting to know Him. You assume it must be pleasing to Him, since it pleases your religious conscience. However, God cannot be discovered, found, or known according to religious things or works. He can only be found in a living relationship through Jesus Christ.

Because of my past influences,

the initial idea of having a relationship with God was very foreign to me. Sadly, because my pursuit was misdirected in my newfound Christian walk, I began to walk in the ways of religion. Such religious emphasis is nothing more than a detour, a counterfeit to hide the fact that your walk lacks the real heart of God.

Due to the religious detour I was taking, I found myself becoming enslaved to religious standards that lacked spirit and life. The more I tried to do right in my own power, the more I became confused and found myself doing wrong. Eventually, I found myself spiritually bankrupt.

It cannot be emphasized enough: Christianity is all about relationship with God. Jesus came to restore the relationship that was ripped apart in the Garden of Eden. The Apostle John tells us in His first epistle what it will take to ensure a right relationship with the Lord.

In 1 John 1:3-7 we are told we must walk in the light if we are to have fellowship with God and one another. The light of God addresses the one thing that tears, rips, and breaks all relationships apart and that is sin. By walking in the light, all sin will be exposed, addressed, and taken care of. Clearly, the light of Jesus will show us the most excellent way of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.

Since I was walking according to my own pious religious beat, I found that I had a veneer of what looked acceptable, but it was nothing more than disobedience to God. This brings us to the next part of the test in 1 John. It has to do with obedience (1 John 2:3-6). If we believe a matter, we will walk in it. To believe something is to assimilate it as truth that will express itself in compliance to the Word. Obedience is the natural expression of a growing relationship with the Lord. It is the product of faith. If we walk by unfeigned faith, we will express it in obedience.

As I walked contrary to God's excellent design for my life, I found myself coming under the spirit of the world. Granted, I justified, adjusted, and conned myself about my Christian walk, but it was obvious that problems existed in my relationship with God. This brings me to the third part of the relationship test, which has to do with

our relationship with the world. The world is what often brings a separation between God and us. If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15-17). If we are dancing with the world according to its tune, we will be out of step with the Lord. We will find ourselves in opposition to His righteous ways if we walk in its ways. It is true that we are in the world, but we are not to be part of its ways or belong to it for that will make us enemies of God (James 4:4).

If we are enemies of God, we can be assured that we are not His children (1 John 3:10). The final part of the relationship test is that we are identified to a spiritual inheritance and legacy. We have been born again into a heavenly family, legally adopted; therefore, our lives should be expressing the reality of the Lord. If we abiding in His household, exposed to His presence and ways, we should be reflecting His glory and emitting the fragrance of His life.

As I realized that my religious detour proved to be lifeless and dead, I had to admit I had taken a terrible alternate route from the real promise of the Christian life. The promise being that of fellowship, of actually being able to once again walk with the Lord in the garden of my heart where I would always discover the real hope of glory in me, Christ Jesus.

Like all spiritual detours, there was only one way I could get back on the right path to be established in a right relationship with the Lord and that was to repent. Detours cause us to walk away from the source of light. It will also cause us to walk in disobedience as we become more like the world in our way of thinking and doing. It was not until I developed a real hatred for my plight that I was able to really repent, thereby, changing my attitude towards my life in Christ and the world.

This brings me to the third test found in 1 John: the fruit test. Christianity is a personal adventure. No one can walk your route, live your life, and become who you are called to be except you. As I came to terms with my personal life in Christ, I realized that I had a choice. When it came to my family and my former cult, I had chosen to assume they were correct without doing my own homework. Regardless of

Con't. Pg. 5, Column 1

AND THE WIND BLEW

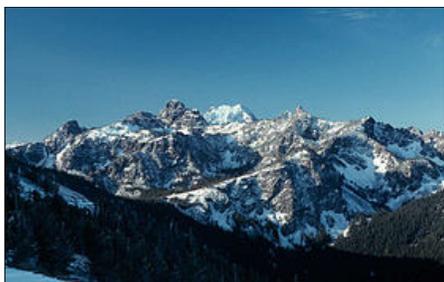
By Jeannette Haley

Have you ever lived in a place where the wind blew hard—I mean *really* hard? Rayola and I did. Over twenty years ago we lived in an old farm house out on the Camas prairie that is located between Cottonwood and Grangeville, Idaho. We loved the sweeping vistas of endless sky and undulating hills, splashed with the vibrant colors of various crops. Great chasms and canyons beckoned to be explored as swirling morning mists rose from their shadowy depths, adding to the mystique of this special place. Even the Northern Lights could sometimes be seen as they danced to a silent symphony that I was certain I could hear with my “spiritual ears”.

All in all it was a wonderful place, especially for an artist, filled with sun and light and color. That is, except for the wind. Oh how the wind could blow across that prairie! They told us that it originated in Hell’s canyon which is the deepest river gorge in North



America. From where we lived, we could see the jagged peaks of the Seven Devils, which are notable mountains in the Hell’s Canyon wilderness.



Sometimes it seemed as if the devil himself did indeed live in Hell’s Canyon, whipping up the wind into a fury that packed a wicked punch. One time as I was struggling to exit the house out the front door the wind

caught me as I opened the screen door. It literally swung me around and flatted me against the side of the house, pinning me there until I managed to fight against this invisible opponent and struggle out to the car.

One day in particular the wind seemed bent on wiping us and the old house off the land for good. For hours it hammered, howled and pounded without ceasing, not even for a second. Deep down it began to dawn on me that there was more to it than just another windy day. This was somehow different—sinister—like an all out attack against our faith itself. Raising my voice against the roaring beast I declared, “Satan, no matter what you do to us, we will serve God anyway!” You can imagine my surprise when it *instantly* stopped! Nothing could be heard except for Rayola, excitedly running down the stairs announcing, “The wind stopped...it just stopped!” There wasn’t even the slightest breeze. All was calm for the rest of the day and night. Truly, He is the Master of the wind.

Sometimes after the farmers had plowed their fields, the cunning wind, as if it had a mind of its own, would angrily target the rich, black topsoil. Tossing it high into the air, the howling fiend forced it through the cracks and crannies of the old house until it grew tired of the game and dumped it unceremoniously into piles and small dunes in random places. In spite of all that, we loved it there with its solitary beauty, and the sense of eternity that filled your souls through the glory of limitless skies, and unhindered horizons. If any place holds the secret of making you feel as if you are living closer to heaven, on the “top of the world” this place is it. For us, it was wild and wonderful, beautiful and beguiling, free and flowing.

Except in the winter.

Winters tested our resolve in every way. It was as if that old house was the target for whatever Hell’s Canyon could throw at us, and throw at us it did. With only a small wood stove and a few narrow, inadequate electric strips to keep us warm we were no match for the winter wind. It literally blew right through the house. No amount of heavy duty cardboard on the inside of the windows that faced Hell’s Canyon, and no amount of vinyl win-

dow coverings tacked outside could stop the powerful force of the wind. Even the window curtains floated on the cold air that penetrated our best attempts to keep it out. The shrieking wind clawed and ripped at the aging roof, hurling fragments of wood shingles to the ground. We used them for kindling. The wind roared, and moaned and whistled. And we froze.

In time, and with mixed emotions, we moved from our old rental house. Following the Lord’s leading, we descended from our spectacular and inspiring perch on “the top of the world” into the valley of struggling humanity in the north Seattle area. There we were confronted with buffeting winds of another nature—winds of suffering, sorrow, loss, pain, testing, trials and tribulations.

And the wind blew....

Everyone—indeed, all of nature itself—experiences such “winds.” (See Romans 8:19-23.) No one is exempt, but God has left us with a “great cloud of witnesses” who have gone on before us, men and women of “renown” (or great faith and character) such as Job. We read in Job 1:18-19, “*While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*” Besides the great loss of his children, Job also lost his servants and means of providing food and clothes for his family and others, lost his mode of transportation (camels) and lost his health.

As you study the Book of Job, you can see how the winds of adversity hit Job emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. Yet, in spite of all this Job said, “*Naked came I out of the my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed by the name of the LORD*” Job 1:21. And if these Satanically derived and devastating events weren’t enough, his friends turned out to be “*miserable comforters*” Job 16:1b. All they had to offer was their own limited understanding, knowledge, wisdom

and theology. A good lesson here for Christians is that even truth, if taken to extremes, can become an untruth; and, theology, no matter how correct it may be, if applied in the wrong way to the wrong situation is nothing more than an empty, meaningless and sometimes cruel platitude.

The winds that blew against the fabric of Job's life and faith were not winds of judgment, but rather served a threefold purpose. First, God had a man who refused to curse Him regardless of the suffering he experienced, thus silencing Satan. Secondly, Job's faith was not only tested, but he came out knowing God in a greater way. He said, *"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"* Job 42:5, 6. Third, the Book of Job stands forever as a testimony of integrity and faith in the midst of great suffering, and is a powerful reminder of the faithfulness of God.

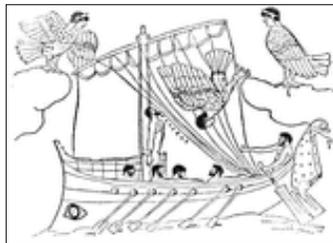
And the wind blew....

Winds of change, winds of judgment. Who can deny that what we are seeing and experiencing in these end times is anything less than God's Word being fulfilled, as world leaders unite to defy the living God? *Psalm 2* gives us God's perspective: *"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure"* verses 1-5. Regardless of how vile and terrible the winds of the wicked are, the Lord "has the last laugh." Verse 6 declares, *"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."* In spite of all the best efforts of the world planner, the final ruler will not be George Soros or his puppet, Barak Hussein Obama, but the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God declares concerning the reign of His Son on the earth, *"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear,*

and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" verses 9-12. What precious promises those of us who put our trust in Him have, in spite of the trials and tribulations before us—times when the strong winds of death and destruction are let loose upon the earth. We who belong to the Lord have great consolation in Him, knowing that the day is surely coming when the ungodly are *"like the chaff which the wind driveth away"* *Psalm 1:4*.

And the wind blew...the winds of false doctrine that are so often steadily blowing in churches across the land. Paul warned, *"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive"* *Ephesians 4:14*. The Body of Christ has always faced the winds of deception; however, in the world of technology that we live in today these winds are more varied, subtle, stronger and far spread than ever before. Many winds of doctrine can be compared with the honey-sweet song of the female Sirenes (sirens), who also lay in wait to deceive. According to Greek Mythology their singing was so alluring that sailors could not pass them by, but instead cast themselves into the sea, and perished. The three most notable sirens were Parthenope, Ligeia and Leucosia.



We can compare Parthenope with the winds of doctrine that put forth a maiden face. These winds blow softly, and appear innocent, pure and attractive. Never mind that underneath lie cunning craftiness designed to lead one's heart away from the Word of God. After all, the allurements of maiden-face heresy is how it stirs up the sensual passions (youthful lusts) of both men and women. This

false wind appeals to the pride and universal desire of all mankind for something that promises instant gratification—something that sounds "spiritual," but feeds the flesh, and promises a place of ecstasy in the spiritual realm that is actually base and carnal. This doctrine offers everything "positive" and beneficial to those who put their trust in it. There is no price to pay (taking up one's cross), no self-denial, but rather all the "good" things that the world has to offer veiled in a thin veneer of religiosity. However, the Bible says that to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God.

The second siren was called Ligeia which means clear-voiced, whistling. This siren, like the celestial voice Satan can use (and I heard that voice once, loud and clear) draws men and women through emotional experiences. This wind of doctrine powerfully stirs up the emotions through cleverly devised fables, and also sensual music, offering a completely different reality than God's truth (which *is* reality). After all, it sounds so compelling, so beautiful, so wonderful and heavenly, who can reject it? It promises love, unity, peace and heaven. It shuns the clear teaching of Scripture concerning sin, death and hell. It allures and beguiles with half-truths, twisting the Word of God to say what it does not say in order to delude its victims into an ethereal fantasy that has no substance to it whatsoever.

Leucosia, meaning "white substance" is the third siren. What is this mysterious white substance? It brings to mind the "white light" of the New Agers whose "light" is spiritual darkness and death. According to *2 Corinthians 11:14* Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. How else could he deceive the nations? How else could he deceive well-meaning people? We must never allow ourselves to be lulled to sleep by all the ear-tickling winds of doctrine that cause us to ignore the "wiles of the devil." The siren call of the New Age can be overwhelmingly alluring to those who want to understand "all mysteries" and "hidden things." It truly can cause a person's mind to enter into a "white fog" of endless seeking

Con't. Pg. 5, Column 3

their wrong influence, the Lord would still hold me responsible for personally finding out the truth for myself.

This brings me to the final realization: I was wrong. Due to our fragile egos, we hate being wrong. However, because of our fallen condition, we all start out from the wrong premise. It does not matter if our religion or family is right or wrong, we still must personally address our own spiritual condition to experience salvation. Before I met Christ, I was wrong in every way. Even after I became a Christian, I took plenty of wrong detours from what was right. I spent the first seven years of my Christianity wrong the majority of the time, and the following years partially right. Finally, I can say at this stage of my journey that I have simply learned what it means to be right. I have to be right about Jesus, be right before Him, and do right by others. As long as all three of these aspects are correct, I can be assured of right standing in Him.

The more I strive to be like Christ in my disposition, attitude, and conduct, the more I become an open vessel from which His love can flow to me and through me to others. This is the only motivation that will ensure the fruit of the Spirit and honorable conduct. In his first epistle, John makes it clear that you cannot walk in the darkness of hatred (this includes its cohorts such as bitterness, unforgiveness, and malice) towards others, and claim you love God (1 John 3:13-19).

Godly love gives us the freedom to enjoy the life we have in Christ. Since we know and love Him, we can trust Him; therefore, we can take joy in what He has said and abide in confidence towards Him (1 John 1:3-4). In the past I have learned if joy is missing from my life, I have let go of my anchor, the Rock of ages. When you let go of that which is eternal, you become adrift in the empty oceans of the world that will cause you to be taken by the various winds of false doctrines and the endless waves of disappointment.

When a person chooses the excellent way of godly love, he or she will walk in the ways of righteousness (1 John 2:29). Godly love demands we take the high road in our relationship with God and others. The high road in

Christianity is the path of righteousness. Righteousness can only honor in a way that is considered reasonable in service, but it will prove to be beyond reproach when it comes to our testimony, and sacrificial when it comes to the world’s way of viewing matters. It will always submit to that which is worthy of consideration and is regarded as beneficial to others.

To walk in the ways of righteousness will also cause us to be overcomers in the world. We know that all that is done out of unfeigned faith is counted as righteousness to us. The Apostle John makes it clear in 1 John 5:4-5 that the evidence of a victorious walk for a Christian is that he or she is an overcomer. “For whatever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.”

The spiritual journey begins with Christ, but it also must end with Him to ensure the victory. In between is the journey of discovering that everything the Bible says about Him is “Amen, so be it, for it is so”. If one does not begin with Christ, it is obvious that he or she will not end with Him. If one does not end with Christ, then he or she must concede that a detour has taken him or her away from the center of what is right, sane, and trustworthy.

As we can see, there is no secret when it comes to the victorious, overcoming Christian. And, when it comes to being right it is not a matter of who has the right opinion about something; rather, it is about being right about and before Jesus. So much of what we can get caught up with is non-essential in the scheme of things. To get caught up with the insignificant, worldly, and foolish is to take a detour that will only lead to one dead end after another.

I have taken many detours in my Christian walk, but praise God when I got tired of hitting my head against the same wall, and seeing the same scenery because I was being taken around the same “old” mountain, the Lord was waiting graciously to lead me to that place of fellowship and restoration with Him. Each time I would marvel of how my pigheaded conclusions and ways led me down the wrong path. I would wonder how I could foolishly forget that the Lord has provided everything I

have need of to experience what is real and lasting, while still ending up taking foolish detours and accepting wretched counterfeits. After examining my foolishness in such matters, my conclusion was always the same: I am a work in progress and will remain so until I see Him face to face. Meanwhile, the journey continues.

What about you. Are you taking a detour right now? †

“Winds” - Con’t. from Pg. 4

for the “real meaning” behind everything, including Scripture. People who pride themselves in their intelligence and give themselves over to the powerful spirit of deception of the New Age (which is really ancient paganism) find themselves afloat on a bizarre sea of disconnected thoughts, teachings, emotions and experiences. Satan knows how to play with the human intellect—he knows how to interject mental “experiences” into a person’s mind that will convince him or her that this is indeed reality. The truth is, once a person enters through the wide door of metaphysics, and the occult in order to understand the “hidden things” and “mysteries of the ages,” they have entered into a demonic realm that only God and the blood of Jesus can deliver them from. This is a dangerous place to find oneself, yet we linger near the forbidden door to the occult, and play along the edge of the abyss every time we expose ourselves, or our children, to any of the New Age beliefs, practices, philosophies, teachings, books, movies, charms, artwork or music (to name a few.)

While volumes have been, and could be written defining and detailing the myriad of “winds of doctrine” ranging from the most blatant down to the most subtle, such knowledge is worthless if a person does not love the truth. Unless a person truly embraces a genuine love for the truth, he or she will be sent a “*strong delusion, that they should believe a lie*” 2 Thessalonians 2:11. Receiving a love for the truth means receiving Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. It means receiving both the

written Word, and the Living Word into one's heart, and loving Him with everything within you. Loving the truth means believing that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" John 4:24. Loving the truth means loving what God loves, and hating what God hates. It is loving the truth through the fear of God, obedience to His will, and living in godly sobriety. Loving the truth means living it.

Winds of doctrine will continue to blow until Jesus returns to rule and reign. Therefore, it is vital that the people of the Lord know Him, know His Word, walk in His Spirit, and know how to test spirits, which we are commanded to do in *1 John 4:1*. One of the other reasons people are so easily swayed by false teachers and prophets is because they have never been properly disciplined in the first place. They may have been taught by many teachers, yet have never been disciplined in the ways of God. Therefore, anyone who comes along who claims to be a Christian, or who sports a certain title that may give the impression that he or she is genuinely saved and living a holy life, or who has a "big ministry," and so forth can easily deceive a person who has never been disciplined and established in the faith.

And the wind blew....

About 120 people were all in one place, in one accord when it suddenly came—the mighty, rushing wind. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" *Acts 2:1-4*. The fulfillment of *Joel 2:28* and the words of John the Baptist who prophesied, "he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" *Luke 3:16b*. The promise came in a mighty, rushing wind—the promise of Jesus. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come

unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" *John 16:7, 8*.

Consider what Jesus said to Nicodemus in *John 3:6-8*, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Jesus made it clear that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Man must be "born again" of God's Spirit if he is to enter into God's kingdom. The disposition of man must be changed from the old selfish, self-life to the new disposition of a son or daughter of God. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" *2 Corinthians 5:14, 15*.

Just as the powerful winds that blow over the face of the earth alter the landscape, so too must we, if we would be truly born from above, allow His Spirit to regenerate us from within. *2 Corinthians 5:17* has not changed in spite of what many false prophets teach. God's Word never changes, and still declares, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

And the wind blew...the unseen wind, the wind of the Spirit who assures us that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" *2 Corinthians 4:17, 18*.

Oswald Chambers said, "The fiery furnaces are there by God's direct permission. It is misleading to imagine that we are developed in spite of our circumstances; we are developed because of them. It is mastery in circumstances that is needed, not mastery over them." ✠

THE GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

"I had the physical sense of being prayed for. Even when I knew nothing and received no letters. I felt warmth as if sitting near a fire. Sometimes this happened in punishment cells, which are very cold. It was like hearing someone pray for me and think about me. This supported me so much. It is difficult to explain. . . I felt and knew I was not forgotten. This was sufficient to make me resist the most difficult moments." - Irina Ratushinskaia—Christian poet imprisoned in the former Soviet Union until 1987

"We are not praying that our borders be opened. We are praying that heaven be opened." - The prayer of a church under persecution in Vietnam

"God, I do not ask you to make my life easy; I do ask you to make me strong." - From a Jewish child—found in the rubble of a Jewish ghetto in Poland after it was bombed by the Nazis

"The persecution of Christians is not about human rights, it is a rite of passage." - Steve Cleary

"We don't pray to be better Christians, but that we may be the only kind of Christians God means us to be; Christlike Christians, that is, Christians who will bear willingly the cross for God's glory." - From a letter smuggled out from the underground church in Romania

"Faith is not even worthy of the name until it erupts into action." - Catherine Marshall

"Faith is never passive. It demands a response. It asks for a mission. It demonstrates the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit." - Pastor Richard Wurmbrand

A special thank you...

...To all whose cards and expressions of sympathy and love mean so very much to us as we mourn the loss of our beloved family member, Angel. Thank you, John, for making her little casket, and for her final resting place on your property. God bless you all always.



RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY TO CONDUCT A RELIGIOUS SERVICE?

Q: *I am confused about what is the right way or wrong way when it comes to the religious services that are being presently conducted in different churches. For instance, some use Bibles and others do not. Some emphasize long drawn-out worship times and others do not. There are churches that appear to be presenting elaborate shows to make some spiritual point, while others seem to have a simple forthright presentation. Is there some way to determine what would be considered a proper "protocol" if there is such course of action when it comes to church services?*

A: I can see why you are confused. Church services can vary. Is there a right way or wrong way when it comes to church protocol? You can listen to arguments from every side about how churches should conduct different ways and means in their services, and you can still walk away even more confused. The truth is, you must ask yourself what are you looking for in a Body of Believers. For example, for me I am looking for a Body of Believers who is distinguished by their commitment to truth, their genuine love for others, and who have a vision for the lost. This vision is made apparent by the body being active in different mission outreaches. As Scripture states, true followers of Christ are distinguished by love and recognize that they have a commission to share the Gospel with others (*John 13:35; Mark 16:15-16*).

Local bodies are to exist for the purpose of edifying and building up the different members of the Body of Christ so they in turn are prepared for ministry and can build others up as well. The members of the body are there to encourage each other to walk in the ways of righteousness, pray for one another, and ensure a spiritual edge is maintained in order to preserve the testimony of the whole. Each local body must serve as a light in their community in order to ensure the integrity of the Gospel message. It is for this reason that we are instructed to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (*Ephesians 4:12-16*;

Colossians 1:17-23; Hebrews 10:25).

The next question you must ask yourself is what do you want to personally see happen when it comes to your spiritual well-being. For me, I am not going to church to have some fleshly experience, to be entertained like the world, or to soothe my religious conscience for the week so I can live as I please the rest of the week; rather, I go to church do business with God.

Christians make up a priesthood (*1 Peter 2:5, 9*). As part of the priesthood, we stand as a representative of God to man and on behalf of man to God. In essence, we are there to do business when it comes to the matters of God. If there is such a thing as ensuring a proper "protocol" when it comes to such matters as worship, I have only been able to draw from the examples and shadows of the tabernacle of old (*Hebrews 8:4-6*).

If you study the tabernacle of the Old Testament, you must note it had three compartments: the outer court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. By studying the route of the priest, you can see a pattern immerge concerning how man is to conduct himself in religious matters. However, the one thing we must recognize is that as priests it is all about preparation to enter into all that God has for each of us. Man cannot receive from the Lord until he has first been prepared to receive. For example, the flesh cannot receive the things of the spirit and the man of the world will see things of the spiritual nature as being foolish (*1 Corinthians 1:17-23; 2:10-14*). Therefore, much of the preparation when it comes to the matters of God's kingdom is to get self out of the way so that God can have His way with us. Let us now consider the pattern.

The only place that men could initially enter the temple area was through the gate of the outer court. There they brought their sacrifices. Scriptures gives us the example of entering the gate with praise and thanksgiving. In fact, one of the sacrifices we can offer the Lord is that of praise. We know that God inhabits the praises of His people (*Psalms 22:3; 100:4; Hebrews 13:15-16*). Praise prepares the mind to break free of the earthly entanglements to consider the

unseen things of heaven. Thanksgiving prepares the heart to become tender with gratitude for who the Lord is and what He has done for us. It is only when the heart is tender before the Lord that it can properly receive from Him.

The priest would stop at the laver and wash himself. The laver represents the Word of God. The Word must cleanse us in all manner of living. So many Christians are practicing hypocrites because the Word of God does not serve as their mirror (*James 1:21-25*). Service that is done outside of the cleansing and preparation of His Word will be considered profane and unacceptable. It is important to point out that the one who delivers the Word, and the ones who receive it must be prepared to do so or it will have no impact.

Once the priest has prepared mind and heart then he or she is ready to enter into the Holy Place to do service before God. It is important to note that the priest did service *before* God, not *to* God. In a sense, the Holy Place was a place of rededication and consecration. Once again, the priest was preparing himself in service before the Lord. The priest had to fill the candlestick with oil. We need to be filled up daily with the Spirit and walk in the light to ensure all personal sins are taken care of. We must take care of the table (of showbread) by ensuring the quality of bread, for in due time we will partake of or identify with the very divine nature of Christ through His promises and as we put on His attitude and way of life more and more (*Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:14; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 1:3-7*).

Then there is the altar of Incense representing our prayer life. We must come there to seek the heart, mind, and will of God about the matters that affect our life in Him and His kingdom (*1 John 5:14*). Andrew Murray said, "We only pray the way we live." Robert McCheyne stated that a man is what he is on his knees before God—and nothing more. The light of the candlestick will expose who we are, but the Altar of Incense will show us who we are becoming in the inner chamber of our hearts.

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The Holy Place represents us doing business before God, but the Most Holy Place points to God doing business with us. The High Priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year. He took off His outer garments



that had the bells attached to it, and walked into it clothed

only in his linen garments that represented righteousness (*Leviticus 16:4*). He offered the necessary sacrifice in the presence of God's Shekinah glory to ensure right standing. We cannot personally come to God in the Most Holy Place unless we first have right standing with Him.

The Most Holy Place is a place of silence, for the Bible tells us to be still and know that God is God (*Psalms 46:10*). It is in the Most Holy Place there is no other knowledge present but the presence of God. There is no breath other than His that we can hear in the secret chamber. In this place there is no outside clamoring, just the consuming awareness of the majesty of God. It is in this place where worship in Spirit and truth take place and intimate communion is the end product.

The beauty about being part of the present day priesthood is that we can make this journey daily into the Most Holy Place. After all, the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place has been ripped in two, and now we can come to the place of mercy in order to find grace (*Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-25*). Since we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, We can humbly approach God and give Him the opportunity to do business with us, knowing that we will walk out satisfied and complete.

I learned a long time ago that it is not what I do for God that counts; rather, it is what I allow Him to do in me (*Philippians 1:6*). When God is able to have His way in my life or in a matter that concerns me, I know that He has done business with me. I also know when I enter into a place of true worship, that I am ready to avail myself to become a living extension of His life to others. After all, I cannot

offer others what I have not yet received from His precious, loving hand.

I am thankful for those pastors and churches that understand that everything done must become an avenue or opportunity for people to prepare to come into those quiet, secret places to gain a greater knowledge and awareness of God. People should never walk out of a service with the sole awareness of how the leaders perform or how sensational the activities of a church were; rather, they should always walk out with a greater awareness of Christ and Him crucified, lifted up on the cross for the world to see so that all who will come, can come and experience the fullness of His salvation and His eternal, abundant life in greater measure (*John 7:37-39; 12:32; 1 Corinthians 2:2*). †

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM A.W. TOZER

I refer to the loss of the concept of majesty from the popular religious mind. The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic.

The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking.

With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence.

Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. The words, "Be still, and know that I am God," mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshiper. . . .

This loss of the concept of majesty has come just when the forces of religion are making dramatic gains and the churches are more prosperous than at any time within the past several

hundred years. But the alarming thing is that our gains are mostly external and our losses wholly internal; and since it is the quality of our religion that is affected by internal conditions, it may be that our supposed gains are but losses spread over a wider field....

The decline of the knowledge of the holy has brought on our troubles. A rediscovery of the majesty of God will go a long way toward curing them. It is impossible to keep our moral practices sound and our inward attitudes right while our idea of God is erroneous or inadequate. If we would bring back spiritual power to our lives, we must begin to think of God more nearly as He is.

In olden days men of faith were said to "walk in the fear of God" and to "serve the Lord with fear." However intimate their communion with God, however bold their prayers, at the base of their religious life was the conception of God as awesome and dreadful. This idea of God transcendent runs through the whole Bible and gives color and tone to the character of the saints. This fear of God was more than a natural apprehension of danger; it was a nonrational dread, an acute feeling of personal insufficiency in the presence of God the Almighty.

Wherever God appeared to men in Bible times the results were the same—an overwhelming sense of terror and dismay, a wrenching sensation of sinfulness and guilt. When God spoke, Abram stretched himself upon the ground to listen. When Moses saw the Lord in the burning bush, he hid his face in fear to look upon God. Isaiah's vision of God wrung from him the cry, "Woe is me!" and the confession, "I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" [Isaiah 6:5].

Prayer: *Lord, fill Your Church with a renewed sense of Your majesty. We may have lost the awe little by little, but we need to recapture it quickly! Lord, we've forgotten how to be still and witness Your majesty. May I rediscover You in a way that affects my entire life...when do I ever get that sense of sinfulness and guilt, fear and dismay in my encounters with You? Forgive me for my casual approach to You and renew in me a fear and wonder in Your presence. Amen.*