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

Redemption The Law of Kinship Part 5 By Rayola Kelley

For the last two months, we have been considering redemption in light of inheritance. Due to sin, our real inheritance has become lost to us. This inheritance does not have to do with the fleshly or earthly domain, but with the unseen, heavenly eternal domain. Since we are so earthbound, it is not unusual to seek in this present age an inheritance that will give us some type of security for the future and hope as to the unstable world around us. The truth of the matter is there is no real hope in this present world, no lasting security in the fleshly life in which we now live, nor is there any stability that can be found in the ever-changing events that are taking place around us.

As Christians, we know that God is our eternal Rock. He cannot be moved regardless of events, nor can the hope He offers be taken away from those who cling to Him. He is immovable and immutable. All that is associated to Him is trustworthy. He alone represents our real inheritance. However, much of this inheritance will not be realized in this present lifetime, but in the next world that is yet to come. Meanwhile, Christians must remember where their real hope must rest and understand the inheritance they should be seeking after to possess.

This brings us to the other aspect of inheritance. It must not only be secured by those who go before the recipients of such inheritances, but sometimes it must be restored by those who are in the position to do so. The one enemy of inheritance is the slavery brought on by unforeseeable debt. Such debt causes people to have to sell their inheritance in order to survive. In such debt individuals either become enslaved or sojourners and wanderers among

strangers in a land where they have no identification or hope of future inheritance. Such individuals often become lost in that which holds no real meaning or purpose.

We see this in the case of Lot. The land could not hold the herds of both Abraham and Lot. Lot chose the lush valleys of Sodom and Gomorrah. Most of us know the story of what happened. However, my question is why did someone who owned herds and was a tent dweller end up in a city without any visible assets? Somehow, Lot lost what he had when he separated from Abraham. Clearly, his status changed when he ceased to be a tenet of the land and herdsman and became a city dweller. First, he, along with his possessions, were taken by a wicked king. It was Abraham who delivered Lot from the king and restored all of his possessions. Perhaps Lot chose the protection of the city, but in the end, he lost almost everything he had in Sodom including his wife. Although his descendants did receive an inheritance, Lot ultimately became a stranger in a land that appeared to hold no real personal inheritance for him (*Exodus 13-14; 19*).

Clearly, this has been true for every believer before they possessed the essence of their real hope and inheritance. Sin clearly took each of us captive in our former, fallen state. We became lost to all that once belonged to us. We became wanderers in a world that held us in captivity to its ways and practices. We had no real hope ever to possess a valuable inheritance marked with the qualities of eternity.

God provided a way in which His people's inheritance could be restored. We get an insight into His provision in regard to His Law. The purpose of such redemption was to ensure the integrity of heritage and future inheritance for His people. It was vital to the people of Israel that they keep the inheritance in the family in order to maintain a heritage that could be passed down from generation to

generation. As believers, we must also recognize that much of the heritage that was to be preserved had to do with the Messiah.

God's Law provided a couple of ways in which to redeem both heritage and land back to its original owners. The laws governing redemption give us some important insight into the character of God as well as the importance of being able to restore inheritance. In *Leviticus 25* God provided the year of Jubilee where every enslaved or indebted Jew would be restored to his original inheritance. Jubilee occurred every 50th year after counting seven sabbatical years. It was a time of complete restitution for the descendants of Israel.

We are told in *Luke 4:19* that Jesus came to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. According to Matthew Henry's commentary, the term the "acceptable year of the Lord" alluded to the year of release or of jubilee when the servants were to be set free from all debts in order to be restored to their original inheritance. We know that Jesus accomplished this on the cross.

God also provided the Law of the kinsman in *Leviticus 25*. If a brother had to sell his property because of debt, a kinsman could redeem it to keep it until the brother could buy it back interest free or until the year of jubilee. If a brother sold his services due to poverty, he was not to be treated as a slave, but a hired servant until he could secure his own release or until the year of jubilee, regardless of whether it was ten years off or a year away. Every point of redemption was calculated up to the year of jubilee.

In *Nehemiah 5*, we see where the Jews were not recognizing their responsibility towards each other. They were not only unfairly enslaving their brethren, but they were charging interest. Their brethren were kept hopelessly oppressed there without hope of restitution. In a sense, *Nehemiah* called judgment down upon those who did not possess the intent of ensuring the means God provided to restore His people to their inheritance. The example in *Nehe-*

miah shows us that people's greed will always prove to be oppressive concerning enslaving others.

In Nehemiah, we see the greed and abuse of even brethren towards one another because the love that expresses itself in obedience was clearly missing. However, there are a couple of incredible examples of redemption when it comes to that of kinsmen redeeming the inheritance for the sake of others. After all, if a person decided to become a responsible kinsman towards an oppressed brother, he risked compromising his own inheritance. This brings us to one of the first examples of the law of kinsman being put into practice in the Old Testament.

It has to do with the story of Ruth. Ruth was the widowed daughter-in-law of the Jewess, Naomi. She was a Moabite, and her point of identification was that of idolatry and paganism. However, her marriage to Naomi's son identified her to the Jewish nation. After all, before the Jews had become a distinct people, they had come out of paganism. Their identification to Jehovah God is what made them a special people.

To appreciate what happened, we must understand what it cost Naomi and Ruth concerning their earthly inheritance. For Naomi, the famine of Israel cost her any future inheritance for it was sold or fell into the hands of others, while the harshness of a foreign life cost the life of her husband and sons. In the end, Naomi had no inheritance, nor did she have the means to regain her original inheritance.

Ruth was eventually brought to a personal crossroad in her life in regard to an earthly inheritance. She could return to her family and be received back and taken care of until she remarried again. It all seemed so logical for Ruth to veer away from the unknown and settle for what her culture would provide for her until she could take her place as a married woman in society.

Since Ruth wanted to know the God of Israel, she chose the unlikely way, and followed Naomi back to Bethlehem. However, Naomi had no real claims on her husband's inheritance. It had been sold in a time of famine. She had no way of it ever

being restored back to her because there was no seed to carry on the lineage. She needed to have someone redeem back her husband's legacy with the intent of raising up a son in a union with Ruth who would ensure the inheritance of Naomi's dead husband and sons. What Hebrew man would become involved with a pagan, and risk his inheritance for his future generations?

God had a plan. He would raise up seed on behalf of Naomi's husband and sons by having a particular man in place. This honorable man would be willing to serve as the redeeming kinsman. His name was Boaz.

Boaz would point to the second greatest example of a kinsman taking responsibility to redeem His brethren back: That of Jesus Christ. Like Boaz, Jesus would agree to become responsible for our well-being and future. He came from the glories of heaven to take on human form in order to serve as a kinsman to you and me. He would clearly redeem people by dying on a cross. In His work on the cross, Jesus would provide a way to raise up seed to eternal life. This seed would have an eternal inheritance restored and made available to those who possessed this new life.

However, in order to cause Boaz to consider himself in such a position, Ruth had to obey Naomi's instructions. If Boaz failed to be an honorable man, Naomi's instructions could have cost Ruth her reputation, as well as a future in Israel. Ruth had to lay at the feet of Boaz in humble submission to show him her willingness to be a vessel that was putting her reputation and life in his hands to ensure a heritage for a widowed woman.

Boaz proved to be an honorable man who was willing to compromise his inheritance to preserve a lineage of a man whose inheritance would have become extinct. We know that the heritage that Boaz and Ruth preserved was that of the Messiah. King David would come forth out of their union. In addition, instead of remaining pagan and unknown, Ruth's story is recorded in the Bible, and she is named along with four other women in the lineage of Jesus that are recorded in *Matthew 1*.

As believers, we must believe and obey Scripture as to what it will mean for us to secure a future inheritance.

We must risk the old life and choose to embark on a new life to know, love and serve the true God of heaven. We must then come to the feet of Jesus, at the point of the cross, seeking His redemption. In humility we must humble ourselves in sincere faith to receive a new life, and in submission we must trust Jesus to be a kinsman that is honorable and worthy in securing our inheritance. If we seek such refuge at the feet of Jesus, we will be named in His book of life that will clearly identify us to not only a new existence, but a new lineage that places us in the family of God and a new inheritance that will afford each of us eternal benefits.

The question is have you received Jesus as the kinsman that would secure such a future for you? Have you chosen to follow the true God of heaven into a new life? Have you placed yourself at the foot of His cross in sincere humility, faith and obedience? Keep in mind, probably only Boaz, Ruth and Naomi knew of her actions until it was recorded in Scripture to preserve the integrity of her reputation, and only God and you will know if you have truly taken such a journey to discover your eternal Kinsman. †

GREAT QUOTES

"Sin is never an accident. It's always intentional." - Ray Greenley

"The liberal says the end of religion is to make man happy while he's alive. And the fundamentalist says the end of religion is to make man happy when he dies." - Paris Reidhead

"Why should a person come to the cross? Why should a person embrace death? With Christ? Because it's the only way that God can get glory out of a human being!" - Paris Reidhead

"Is this really the church of Christ, or are we just calling it the church because of our traditions and history?" - K.P. Yohannan.

"Safety is not the absence of danger, but the presence of God." - Unknown - unknown

"A God-sent Revival must ever be related to holiness" - Duncan Campbell

WHICH CHURCH IS JESUS BUILDING?

By Jeannette Haley

If someone were to ask you which church is the true Christian church, what answer would you give? Perhaps you would see an opportunity to invite them to the church you attend. On the other hand, maybe you would list the churches you deem as false. Then again, you might fudge around the question in order to avoid offending anyone, or going into a lengthy dissertation on the history of the church.

The truth is most of us are so thoroughly conditioned by the Americanized version of Christianity that anything outside of our culturally acceptable norm is viewed with suspicion and often with outright disdain. Even people who never darken the door of a church have preconceived ideas of what a church is, or should be, based on their perception of historic cultural practices. As human beings, we are all creatures of habit, finding security in certain institutions and practices that remain stable (at least outwardly) in our fragile world. We all like to think that our idea of the societal role of churches is a permanent part of the landscape to which we are accustomed.

From the early days of American settlement, churches were built right along with settlements, towns and cities across the nation. Because of freedom and liberty, people could build and attend whatever church appealed to their particular religious persuasion. Even in diversity of theology and doctrine, however, there are certain commonly held beliefs among religious people that, except for a remnant, remain unquestioned. The danger is when the majority of people take cultural and religious traditions for granted, it sets up a mindset that is replicated in each succeeding generation without being questioned as to its biblical validity. Three such ideologies are: 1) Christians must pay tithes to the church, and 2) become members of a local church or at least show up and warm a pew every time the doors are open, and 3) submit to the leadership, and assume they are the final authority, and 4) that "saving souls" is the leaders' job. Sadly, the majority of

churchgoers are ignorant concerning what the Bible teaches about giving (why, how and to whom it should be given to), what the purpose of the local church is, and their own personal responsibility to be the salt and the light in this world.

Thus, what may have begun as a pure Christian fellowship, centered on the Person of Jesus Christ, can eventually morph into something far removed from biblical precepts and standards. This occurs when the church becomes man-centered instead of Christ-centered, and exults in "the church," the pastor, the programs, and the people instead of in Jesus Christ. The result is such a church is no longer the salt and the light, which distinguishes it from the world. Man-centered churches are nothing more than social clubs with Jesus "tacked on" in order to give the appearance of being "Christian." Therefore, the "show must go on," week after week, to generate more money to keep the whole thing in business.

The tragedy is lost, hurting, wounded, hopeless, sin-sick, seeking souls whom Jesus died for "fall through the cracks," while others suffer from spiritual anemia from steady diet of watered-down milk. This is obviously not the church that Jesus is building!

If we are to understand the church Jesus is building, we need to go back to the Bible instead of assuming that what we know today as "the church" is the one He is building. The foundation of Jesus' church is Jesus Himself. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" *Matthew 15b*. This is the Rock that Jesus told Peter He would build His church upon. The revelation God gave to Peter concerning Jesus is that He is God Incarnate. Building upon any other foundation is faulty, dangerous, and in vain.

Jesus' church is not confined to any particular location, denomination or building. His church is the body of Christ, and is made up of people around the world who are born again of His Spirit. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, nei-

ther indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" *Romans 8:5-9*. The Apostle Peter wrote, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ...ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" *1 Peter 2:5, 9*.

The church that Jesus is building understand and believe that: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" *James 1:27*. The church that Jesus is building also "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" *Jude 3*. They also live by the Apostle John's words, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" *1 John 3:14-18*.

The individuals that make up the church that Jesus is building show forth the fruit of the Spirit. They walk in obedience, know the voice of the Shepherd, and follow Him. They worship God in "spirit and in truth." They also know that all power was given to Jesus in heaven and earth; therefore, they go forth teaching, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, making disciples to Jesus. The members of His body are fishers of men, and workers in His harvest field wherever they may be. Their motto is, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" *Philippians*

1:21.

A. W. Tozer sums it up well. "In our time we have all kinds of status symbols in the Christian church—membership, attendance, pastoral staff, missionary offerings. But there is only one status symbol that should make a Christian congregation genuinely glad. That is to know that our Lord is present, walking in our midst! . . .

"No matter the size of the assembly or its other attributes, our Lord wants it to be known by His presence in the midst. I would rather have His presence in the church than anything else in all the wide world.

"Hearing the proud manner in which some speak of the high dollar cost of their sanctuaries must lead people to suppose that spirituality can be purchased. But the secret of true spiritual worship is to discern and know the presence of the living Christ in our midst. . . .

"The Christian church dares not settle for anything less than the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the presence of our divine Prophet, Priest and King in our midst. Let us never be led into the mistake that so many are making—sighing and saying, 'Oh, if we only had bigger, wiser men in our pulpits! Oh, if we only had more important men in places of Christian leadership!'

"In John's vision, the sharp, double-edged sword proceeded out of the mouth of the Son of man. All other swords will fail and vanish, but the sharp sword, the Word of the Lord, will prevail. By all means, we had better stay with the sharp sword of His Word." (The Tozer Topical Reader, Volume One, pg. 98)

Never forget, Jesus' church is wherever He is. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" *Matthew 18:20*. I do not know about you, but I would rather be anywhere with Jesus than sitting in the most magnificent "church" building in the world without His presence. The church that Jesus is returning for is not a denomination or religious system, nor is it a building. The church He is returning for is the church He is building, "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but

that it should be holy and without blemish" *Ephesians 5:27*.

Are you part of the church that He is building? †

QUOTES BY A. W. TOZER

THE SOCIAL CLUB CHURCH

"First, the fellowship of the Church has degenerated into a social fellowship with a mild religious flavor.

"In that regard, I want you to know where I stand—it is important and I want to say it plainly. I want the presence of God Himself, or I don't want anything at all to do with religion. You would never get me interested in the old maids' social club with a little bit of Christianity thrown in to give it respectability. I want all that God has, or I don't want any."

THE CHURCH'S SPIRITUAL CONDITION

"I believe that a pastor who is content with a vineyard that is not at its best is not a good husbandman. It is my prayer that we may be a healthy and fruitful vineyard and that we may be an honor to the Well Beloved, Jesus Christ the Lord, that He might go before the Father and say, 'These are mine for whom I pray, and they have heard the Word and have believed on Me.' I pray that we might fit into the high priestly prayer of John 17, that we would be a church after Christ's own heart so that in us He might see the travail of His soul and be satisfied."

"When you are trying to find out the condition of a church, do not just inquire whether it is evangelical. Ask whether it is an evangelical rationalistic church that says, 'The text is enough,' or whether it is a church that believes that the text plus the Holy Spirit is enough. . . .

"I would rather be part of a small group with inner knowledge than part of a vast group with only intellectual knowledge. In that great day of Christ's coming, all that will matter is whether or not I have been inwardly illuminated, inwardly regenerated, inwardly purified."



SAVING THE LOST

"Christ's call is to save the lost, not the stiff-necked; He came not to call scoffers but sinners to repentance; not to build and furnish comfortable chapels, churches, and cathedrals at home in which to rock Christian professors to sleep by means of clever essays, stereotyped prayers, and artistic musical performances, but to capture men from the devil's clutches and the very jaws of Hell. This can be accomplished only by a red-hot, unconventional, unfettered devotion, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the Lord Jesus Christ." —C.T. Studd (1860-1931) was an English missionary who faithfully served His Saviour in China, India, and Africa

"You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most. Observe: It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring them to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in holiness without which they cannot see the Lord." —John Wesley

"If you have men who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all." — David Livingstone, 1813-1873, Scottish explorer and missionary

"The history of the Church makes one thing absolutely clear: the unity, doctrinal soundness, Scriptural order, and power of the Church can be preserved only by the power of the Spirit. Equally evident is the fact that the Holy Spirit can do this only as there is absolute surrender to the Lord and obedience to His Word. The introduction of man's wisdom and power at any point inevitably brings loss of spiritual power, authority and communion and leads to division, stagnation and defeat until an effective witness ceases." — Alex R. Hay (20th Century Missionary and Church Planter)

SHOULD CHRISTIANS "COMMAND" GOD IN PRAYER?

Q: *I am very disturbed over the practice of some who, when they pray, command God to do what they want. I would be fearful of commanding God to do anything! However, they say that we are told in the Bible to command God, and that I lack true faith. I pray that God's will be done, not mine. Am I missing something in my prayer life? Thank you.*

A: I agree with you that it is a fearful matter to think you can command the God of heaven to bow down to your demands. Such an arrogant heretical belief has been around for at least three decades that I know of. It is associated with those who purport Positive Confession and have merged with the Manifest Sons of God movement.

One of the Scriptures such individuals use is *Isaiah 45:11-12*: "Thus saith the LORD, the Holy one of Israel, and his Maker; Ask me of things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." From initial appearances, it looks like we could command God, but if you study the contents of the chapter you will realize that all commands are strictly being made by God in relationship to His eternal purpose or plan for His people. In fact, what God is doing here is making a statement to those who are striving with Him. He is bringing a contrast by instructing them to ask Him about matters concerning the unseen, but to presume that He can be commanded since He commands the host of heaven and is their Maker is to expose their foolish rebellion. God is clearly defining His supremacy in *Isaiah 45*. If you study the chapter in its full context, you will see that when it gets right down to it, it is God who is commanding things according to His will.

To reiterate His supremacy and abilities, in *Isaiah 45:13* we are also told that God will rise up a righteous

man, even those who are uncircumcised such as in the case of Cyrus who was mentioned in *Isaiah 45:1*, to do His bidding. Nothing is too small or too great for Him to bring about.

It is easy to take Scripture out of context to serve any perverted view on a matter. A good example are the Scriptures found in *Matthew 16:19* and *18:18* where Jesus stated that whatever his followers bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what shall be loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven. It appears that we as believers are being given a lot of power, when in fact this statement is being made in relationship to the Jewish understanding that whatever was prohibited or permitted by the Law was binding on earth as it was in heaven. In the case His followers it would entail the perfect work of the kingdom of God rather than the holy Law of God.

As believers, we have a responsibility to compare all spiritual matters with Scriptural truths and examples. Other Scriptures will, and must bear out, what we believe to be true and must always be found to be consistent and in line with God's character and complete counsel. For example, we know from examples and instructions that the prayers of the righteous avail much, and that we can boldly approach His throne, seeking mercy in hope of obtaining His grace, but there are no other Scriptures that confirm that we have a right to demand God to do anything. The only other example where such arrogance towards God can be found is in *Isaiah 14:13-14*, where Lucifer made five declarations in his heart as to his intent to ultimately rule over God. We know that the end of such arrogance is judgment.

People are also clearly warned about praying amiss for those things they desire to heap on themselves that have nothing to do with righteousness or God's eternal plan. In fact, such prayers are associated with fleshly lusts, spiritual adultery and sensual, demonically inspired envy. We are told that God does not hear the prayers of those who regard such iniquity in their heart, and He resists those who are arrogant or prideful (*Psalms 66:18*; *1 Corinthians 2:13*; *Hebrews 4:16*; *James 3:12-16*; *4:1-11*; *5:16*).

When you consider the right attitude and purpose of prayer, both are

clearly defined in Scripture. Jesus, who was God in the flesh, as well as our example in all matters of righteousness, prayed according to the will of the Father. We are instructed that if we pray according to our Lord's will, we can be assured a matter will be done. If we abide in Him and ask in His name, which means we ask only those things that would be in line with His character, ways and will, it will be done. We need to keep in mind that our faith is not based on what God can do; rather, it is based on who He is. We know that He is trustworthy and able to do what He promises if the environment and timing is right to do so (*Matthew 26:39-44*; *John 14:14*; *15:7*; *Hebrews 11:6*; *1 John 5:14*).

People who think they can change reality through positive confession or believe that they can command God or His angels in the affairs of heaven err in their hearts. Obviously, they do not know God or His ways. Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, such people are not only acting according to the self-will of presumption, which is inspired by foolishness, arrogance and ignorance, but they are also provoking Him with their heretical claims (*Numbers 14:41-45*; *15:30-31*; *Psalms 19:12-14*; *Hebrews 3:9-16*; *2 Peter 2:10-14*). My advice to you is to beware of how close you stand to such an individual and whatever you do, restrain from coming into agreement with his or her antichrist spirit and partaking of his or her damnable sin. If you find yourself in the position of rebuking such an individual, obey the instructions of *Titus 3:10-11*: "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject, Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."

"It is very wonderful. Yes; the heavens, even the heavens of heavens, with all their light and glory, alone seem worthy of Him. But even there He is not more at home than He is with the humble and contrite spirit that simply trust in Him. In His earthly life, He said that the Father dwelt in Him so really that the words He spake and the works He did were not His own, but His Father's. And He desires to be in us as His Father was in Him, so that the outgoings of our life may be channels through which He, hidden within, may pour Himself forth upon men." - F.B. Meyer

MAIL CALL

“. . . the battles continue. I heard that Medicare is going to be hit hard if we like it or not, being there was a surplus of money in Medicare it seem the government couldn't stand it, like a kid with money in his pocket, 'mom if we don't get to the store soon, this money will burn a hole in my pocket'.....I believe JESUS is coming soon and my heart is singing, and hope is rising, I truly am excited, then sometimes I wonder if I am just scared of what is around the corner. Think about you gals often, and thank you again for all that you have spoken into my life." - WA

"I have read a number of books on the New Age. Most people it seems are not aware that the contents of the New Age religion are composed of all things that oppose Jesus Christ. Some years ago, I saw a family interviewed about their former New Age activities, and in response to 'which religions are New Age and which are not?' they said, "ALL religions and activities that do not teach the death, burial and resurrection and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to set up His kingdom, are New Age." They said that after their whole family became born again, they were shocked to see how many people in the church falsely believe that the New Age pertains only to a certain few groups who practice pantheism or witchcraft. Remember to the Lord in prayer the condition of so many people who are involved in so many churches, falsely so-called." - WA

LETTER TO A PASTOR

We received your colorful flyer this week announcing your new church . . . and can appreciate your enthusiasm and hard work. We understand your desire to reach out to as many "unchurched" people in our community as possible. Your approach, while not unique, is interesting. Therefore, please bear with me as I briefly comment on some of your "selling points."

First, "loud music." To be honest with you, if the flyer had described the music in your church as being anointed, worshipful, heart stirring

and God honoring, it would have meant a genuine time of worship and edification. After all, if we wanted to "rock out," damage our hearing, vigorously exercise and shatter our nerves, we could go to the Athletic Club (or a nightclub for that matter.)

Secondly, apparently it is important for contemporary churches to guarantee that there is a "casual atmosphere." If by "casual", you mean clean, modest and comfortable, fine. The problem is we live in a culture that is in gross moral decline and rebellion that expresses itself in, not only attitudes, but in manner of dress (or undress). There is a fine line between people wearing their best to impress others, and people dressing decently in order to bring honor to the Lord. The impression this emphasis on a "casual atmosphere" leaves is that there is no sanctity, or difference (contrast) between the inside of the church and the world outside of the church. Anything goes. The truth is, however, that not "anything goes" with a Holy God.

Third, your flyer advertises: "short service." We wonder if this means that you are ashamed or apologetic for the Word of God. (Presuming, of course, that you do preach the unadulterated Word of God.) Isn't the Gospel the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes? What if the Apostle Paul cut short the Holy Spirit and stuck to a "short sermonette" in order to please the crowd? Where would the Church be today? If you had advertised that your services were not man-controlled, but Spirit-led, and that there was no set time to start or finish, you might be surprised how many hungry and thirsty sheep would find their way through the doors.

The fourth point—"fun for the kids." Is this what the Lord has outlined in His Word concerning children? Where in the Bible does God instruct us to entertain children to the detriment and destruction of their souls? Even a two-year-old can learn about Jesus and invite Him into his or her heart. Kids are entertained out of their wits all week long. Shouldn't the short time they are in Sunday School (or whatever you call it) be different? Shouldn't they get a sense that this is a hallowed time of intense learning

about God, how to pray, sing Bible songs, learn what is right and what is wrong, etc.? Even the Communists know better! Children are not stupid.

The comment that you folks are "regular people who are friendly, but not obnoxious..." makes us wonder if you see yourselves as somehow "better" or "more approachable" than people in other churches. Another question is, how do you reconcile wanting "to make the most of life, but not taking yourselves too seriously" with the commandments of Jesus to "deny self, pick up our cross, and follow Him"? Are you trying to give the impression that "to make the most of life" in a worldly sense is acceptable to God, while "not taking yourselves too seriously" eliminates the reality that the "wages of sin is death" and without repentance there can be no salvation? People who claim to be serving God cannot afford to take these life and death issues lightly.

In answer to "What should I expect?" how wonderful, surprising and refreshing it would have been to read, "Come and experience a life-changing encounter with the Living God—a place where you can find the answers to your questions concerning God, salvation, and eternity. Come and learn of Jesus and find rest for your soul. Come, hungry and thirsty, and be satisfied with the Living Water and the Bread from Heaven. Come and drink from the wells of salvation, and meet the One who cares for your soul. Come with your sorrow, fear, brokenness and find healing. Come to the place where you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free—where Jesus gives life and that more abundantly."

If your flyer had only lifted Jesus up for Who He is instead of making the flippant, almost demeaning and mocking remark of "check out this whole Jesus thing...at your own pace and without losing your sense of humor along the way," we, along with others, would have been the first to accept your invitation. Instead, our hearts are heavy, knowing that yet another man-centered, man-pleasing, man-exalting church is being promoted. In God's kingdom, the end does not justify the means. †