



“Forsaking All to Follow Jesus”

What Does a God-Centered Life Look Like?

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“Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.”

1 Corinthians 2:13

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“Forsaking All to Follow Jesus”

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Introduction

The implications and dynamics of Christianity go way beyond our “selves” and our personal lives. The purposes and activities of God are international and cosmic. There is much that could be said about Self-Centeredness as a consequence, if not the cause, of the Fall of Humanity. But suffice to say here that **most Western Christians have not entered into salvation from Self - that is, the “setting free” and “deliverance” from Self-Centeredness.**

Therefore, there is very little sacrificial living for God. This Self-Centeredness has a “Christian” variety, which is the sister of a religious Man-Centeredness – that is, the quasi-Christian perspective that sees the purpose, ministry and mission of the Church is to meet human needs. This Self / Man-centered perspective is the only option for the World; but unfortunately, it is also all-pervasive in the professing Church, blurring the distinction between the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdoms of this World, between those in the World and those who “are not of” it, between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Social Gospel, between the work of God and political activities. Consequently, today in the professing Church, we see little to no authentic passion or fervor

for the kingdom of God.¹ Instead, since **Materialism** is a primary symptom of Self-Centeredness and Man-Centeredness, we see **an all-pervasive culture of Materialism**. And according to my observation, this Materialism particularly **epitomizes the younger generations in the West** – both in and outside of the professing Church. It is **exactly this which has motivated me to do this study of “Forsaking All to Follow Jesus”**.

The goal of this study is to take a closer look at the Lord’s call to **“forsake all”**. We will take an in-depth look at both **“forsaking”** and **“all”**, and their correlation with **“Self-Centeredness”**, **“Man-Centeredness”**, **“the World”** and **“Materialism”** – all as in opposition to **“Meeting God’s Needs”** - that is, His Eternal Plans and Purposes for His Kingdom and His Church.

¹ “God’s will being done here on earth as it is in heaven.” – Matthew 6:10. “Righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” – Romans 14:17

Readings²

21“Looking at him, Jesus showed love to him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” 22But he was deeply dismayed by these words, and he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. 23And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” 24And the disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus responded again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” 26And they were even more astonished, and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?” 27Looking at them, Jesus said, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.” 28Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and have followed You.” 29Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, 30but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.” Mark 10:21-31³

² All scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* unless otherwise noted.

³ Cf. Matthew 19:27-30

[25](#)“Now large crowds were going along with Him, and He turned and said to them, [26](#)‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

[27](#)Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. [28](#)For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? [29](#)Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who are watching it will begin to ridicule him, [30](#)saying, ‘This person began to build, and was not able to finish!’ [31](#)Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to face the one coming against him with twenty thousand? [32](#)Otherwise, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and requests terms of peace. [33](#)So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

[34](#)Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? [35](#)It is useless either for the soil or the manure pile, so it is thrown out. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.’” Luke 14:25-34

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“Forsaking”

We will be discussing the idea of “forsaking all to follow Jesus” in the context of *a God-Centered life*. “Following Jesus” is the stuff of discipleship.⁴ And true discipleship is a God-Centered life, which we will be elucidating as we go through this study. Two other words are prominent in the title: “forsaking” and “all”. Using the context of Jesus’ words in the gospels, we will take an expanded look at the meaning of these two words.

The two passages in the Readings contain several words and phrases which, in various ways, communicate “forsaking” in two senses – **inwardly** and **outwardly**, or *“being willing to”* and *“actually doing it”* consecutively. Let’s look at those words and phrases:

⁴ I have written extensively on “Discipleship” – what it means to “follow Jesus” - in my articles, [The Vineyard of the Lord](#) and [The Husbandman](#).

“Sell”⁵ – to trade or barter. An outward forsaking – *“actually doing it”*.

“Left”⁶ – past tense of “leave” – to forsake or lay aside or yield up. An outward forsaking – *“actually doing it”*.

“Hate”⁷ Generally speaking, commentators give us the understanding that Jesus is saying we must love Him (as God) MORE THAN human beings (family members) and more than our possessions. Adam Clarke’s comment based on other scripture references seems quite convincing that this understanding is well-grounded in the Hebrew idiom.⁸ So, Jesus is NOT saying we must literally hate family and possessions, but rather love Him more than these – and by extension, *be willing to forsake these* (if He asks, or if necessary) *in order to continue following Him*. An

⁵ Mark 10:21, Greek: *pōleō*, Strong’s # 4453

⁶ Mark 10:28-29, Greek: *aphiēmi*, Strong’s # 863

⁷ Luke 14:26

⁸ *Commentary on the Bible*, Adam Clarke: “**And hate not** - Matthew, Mat 10:37, expresses the true meaning of this word, when he says, He who loveth his father and mother more than me. In Mat 6:24, he uses the word hate in the same sense. When we read, Rom 9:13, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, the meaning is simply, I have loved Jacob - the Israelites, more than Esau - the Edomites; and that this is no arbitrary interpretation of the word hate, but one agreeable to the Hebrew idiom, appears from what is said on Gen 29:30, Gen 29:31, where Leah’s being hated is explained by Rachel’s being loved more than Leah. See also Deu 21:15-17.”

inward forsaking – *“being willing to”* which at some time may be demonstrated outwardly.

“Calculate the cost”⁹ – to count or compute. An **inward forsaking** – *“being willing to”* which at some time may be demonstrated outwardly.

“Consider”¹⁰ – to take counsel with oneself or deliberate or ponder. An **inward forsaking** – *“being willing to”* which at some time may be demonstrated outwardly.

“Give up”¹¹ – to forsake or say goodbye to or renounce.¹² An **outward forsaking** – *“actually doing it”*.

The Inward, the Outward, and the Visible Fruit

The **inward forsaking** is a heart surrender which is WILLING to forsake all to follow Jesus. The **outward forsaking** is ACTUALLY forsaking “all” to follow Jesus. The **VISIBLE FRUIT** of forsaking is

⁹ Luke 14:28, Greek: *psēphizō*, Strong’s # 5585

¹⁰ Luke 14:31, Greek: *bouleuō*, Strong’s # 1011

¹¹ Luke 14:33, Greek: *apotassomai*, Strong’s # 657

¹² “In that *forsake* lies the key to the whole passage” (Trench). “Christian discipleship is founded in self-renunciation.” (Vincent)

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a God-Centered Life. That is, a life in which ALL THINGS are seen and addressed in the context of a desire to grow in knowing and understanding God. (Jeremiah 29:23-24) In other words, it is NOT *ADDING* GOD TO YOUR LIFE, but rather, everything thing in your life revolves around knowing and understanding God. I have written at length about *the need for a God-Centered Christianity*, in another article entitled, [The God-Centered Life](#). Here, we are specifically discussing “forsaking all to follow Jesus”, but in the context (the visible fruit) of a God-Centered life.

The Call and Our Responses

I fully understand that Jesus’ words, taken literally, are very radical. And this is why reactions to them are most often:

“Yes, but....” Or: “Those words (along with the Sermon on the Mount) were intended for Jewish disciples of that day, and not for us who are under grace in the New Covenant.” Or: “Obviously, Jesus meant that we ONLY NEED TO BE WILLING to forsake all.”

I think the latter may be true; but I will add: If Jesus only requires someone to *be willing to* - but not *actually have to* - forsake all, that someone will be part of minority of Christ’s disciples. I say

this because it seems to me that if we “look at the numbers” from an historical perspective and from a world-wide perspective – namely, not just Western nations, but other nations in which Christians suffer persecution - Jesus DID and DOES ask most of His disciples to “forsake all” at some point in their lives.

This “asking” may present itself as a PRE-REQUISITE to follow a particular call to ministry (for example, a missionary). Or this “asking” may present itself as a CHOICE. That CHOICE between: A) pleasing the desires of a congregation, and/or a church board, and/or a denomination, in order to secure one’s “livelihood” as an employed “full-time minister”, or B) being a “faithful servant” risking that secure livelihood by saying and doing what you believe pleases the Lord.

Or: This “asking” may present itself as a CHOICE between suffering persecution as a follower of Christ or escaping persecution by “denying” Christ. (for example, Peter) One aspect of persecution is the LOSS of freedom – for the Christian, it is the loss of the freedom to publicly express and live out one’s beliefs and worship.

But other types of LOSS will come in everyone's life – brought on by aging and illness – the LOSS OF PHYSICAL ABILITIES and/or MENTAL ABILITIES – namely, the onset of DISABILITIES. During these times and seasons in life, the “asking” presents itself in this way: *“Are you willing for these physical and mental abilities to be FORSAKEN (LOST), yet still live both your inward and outward life ‘doing all things for the glory of God’?”* (1 Corinthians 10:31)

While this may occur for only a season in someone's life, *it will occur* in the life of *every* disciple. I honestly don't know how Jesus' words can retain their integrity otherwise.

“The Doing of the Thing”

excerpt from Bob Bennett's album *Songs from Bright Avenue*

*We take the nodding of the head,
And all the words that can be said;
We take the very song I sing
For the doing of the thing.*

“All”

⁵“Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross.” Philippians 2:5-8

“Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

We must acknowledge that Jesus gave ALL. We must also acknowledge that we tend to give only a PART. We know how to give just a “sufficient” *part* of ourselves and our lives for God. (We still preserve our Self-Centeredness.)

Concerning the gospel passages we cited, there is much which begs explanation, and some things are difficult to discern and require in-depth exposition. But for now, I would like to just focus on some points our Lord clearly made:

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- In Mark’s gospel, chapter 10, Jesus used the word “all” – namely, “forsaking all” in connection with entering the Kingdom of God. (vv.21-25)
- Peter said that the disciples of Christ had “left everything” to follow Jesus. (v.28)
- Jesus specified that the “all” and the “everything” included houses, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, farms (v.29) – that is, family members and occupations.
- In Luke’s gospel, chapter 14, Jesus again detailed being willing to choose Him over family members¹³ (vv. 26-27); and adds being willing to choose Him over “your own life”. The most literal meaning of the Greek word, *psuche*¹⁴, is: “the vital force which animates the body and shows itself in breathing”¹⁵. While it is sometimes translated “soul”, Jesus was most likely referring to loving Him more than staying alive – that is, *being willing to be martyred for the Cause of*

¹³ This is the consensus of most commentators as to the meaning of “hating”.

¹⁴ Strong’s # 5590. Its root word is *psucho*, Strong’s # 5594, meaning to breathe.

¹⁵ *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*

Christ. In this passage, Jesus also adds that it is necessary to “carry one’s own cross” in order to follow Him and be His disciple. (vv.26-27) I believe the proper understanding of **“the cross” is “denying oneself” in order to follow Jesus.**¹⁶ Verse 25 tells us that Jesus said these things to people EVEN BEFORE they began to follow Him. He was not speaking to “mature Christians”. He was speaking to people who were not yet Christians. He was informing people that **this is what it means to be His disciple.**

- In verses 28-32, Jesus communicates that if one is not willing to forsake family members, occupation, and “your own life”, one CANNOT BE HIS DISCIPLE, because that person will start, but not finish – he will not be able to handle the demands of following Jesus.
- And finally, Jesus adds that one must **give up all his own possessions** - or be willing to if He asks you to - in order to be His disciple. (v. 33)

¹⁶ I base this understanding on the fact that Jesus, Himself, defined “the cross” as self-denial in order to follow Him. Cf. Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23.

As I said, there are additional things in these passages, but let's just consider the things I've extrapolated above as things Jesus said were necessary to enter the kingdom of God¹⁷, necessary to follow Him, and necessary to be His disciple.¹⁸

But what is "all"? As we have seen from what Jesus specified in the passages from Mark and Luke, "all" includes but is not limited to:

- family members
- occupation
- one's "own life"

But in any given situation, it may be MORE or LESS than that. The specifics of WHAT is forsaken, and the specific details of HOW the cross is taken up CANNOT BE PRESCRIBED by myself – or anyone else. As Lord, ONLY JESUS CAN PRESCRIBE those details in each individual's life – the "what", the "when", the "where" and the "how". I may offer my personal

¹⁷ Jesus also said that it is necessary to be born of the Spirit (regenerated) in order to see and enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:3-8; Cf. Romans 8:9)

¹⁸ Because of Peter's question in Mark 10:26, one *might possibly* also consider these things necessary "fruit consistent with repentance" (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8) required for demonstration of the kind of faith required for authentic salvation (James 2:18-26).

life experience in the Lord as an example; but I cannot offer it as a *prescription* for someone else's life.

But, as a good tree bears good fruit, Jesus said we CAN know the true and the false¹⁹ by observing the "fruit". In this case, the "fruit" is A LIFE LIVED - not just personal devotional times, not just corporate religious activities, and not just service of meeting the needs of people.²⁰ No, in this case, the "fruit" is LIFE DECISIONS BEING LIVED OUT - not the desire of one's heart being spoken - but what is ACTUALLY LIVED OUT at any given time. (James 2:17-18)

If, in fact, one knows the Lord, **one can recognize an authentic forsaking and embracing of the cross when you see it, and when it is lacking.** What does the fruit of forsaking "all" look like? Let me begin with a few personal life observations:

¹⁹ In this case, authentic and unauthentic discipleship.

²⁰ I dare say that for most, "serving the Lord" means serving people. But serving the Lord may or may not include serving people. ESSENTIALLY, Serving the Lord is NOT serving people, per se, but the serving the Lord's ETERNAL PLANS AND PURPOSES FOR HIS KINGDOM AND CHURCH. This is something which will be discussed further, later in this article.

- There are stages in life which we can label as: “young adults”, “adults”, and “the elderly”.
 - In each of these stages is it possible to live a God-Centered life, although it may look different at each stage.
 - In each of these stages there are common excuses for not living a God-Centered life as we are defining it:
 - Young Adults: *“After, I get an education and get started in a career”*
 - Adults: *“After we’ve worked to provide for our children – that is, after they’re grown, educated and have established their own households”*
 - The Elderly: *“I’m just too old”*

- However, a few thousand years ago, Jesus already dismissed these excuses:

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[57](#)” As they were walking along the road, someone said to Jesus, “I will follow You wherever You go.” [58](#) Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.” [59](#) Then He said to another man, “Follow Me.” The man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” [60](#) But Jesus told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead. You, however, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” [61](#) Still another said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first let me bid farewell to my family.” [62](#) Then Jesus declared, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:57-62; Cf. Matthew 8:18-22

What Does “All” Look Like?

As we go through this section, please understand there are two things I desire to make clear:

- I. Only Jesus is Lord. Only Jesus can prescribe what “forsaking all” will look like in your life.
- II. “Forsaking all” will look different during different seasons of your life.

So, what is “all”?

Jesus specified MATERIAL THINGS like father, mother, children, land, houses, riches, etc. In other words, it is not just a “heart attitude” or “holding on to one’s possessions lightly” – it’s a physical letting go and leaving He is referring to. (There IS the valid argument that human beings need material things in order to physically survive, etc.; and we’ll touch on that shortly when we discuss “Conventional Life Categories”.)

“All” is ALL; and that is key to understanding. “All” can be understood to be literally ALL. And “all” can be understood as that which REPRESENTS ALL. A short story from our personal lives might help to explain what I mean by that:

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In 1983, the Lord called my wife, Frances, and I to leave the USA to live and minister to the Church in South Africa. The Lord gave us many wonderful affirmations and confirmations of this call – some were quite supernatural. But we also put out a type of “fleece” to the Lord by stipulating that we would leave the USA only after our house sold. In faith, we sold up and divested ourselves of all our possessions, except the clothing, books, and a few musical instruments we were shipping by boat to South Africa. The date for shipping our things came. And then the date for our overseas flight came. But, because the particular dynamics of the housing market at that time were not in our favor²¹, our house had not sold. (We learned not to give stipulations to the Lord!) So, what were we going to do? Stay or leave? We left. And we left our house on the market to be sold by a realtor friend. We had only enough money to get to South Africa. We did not have any money to get back home to the USA. This was our situation until our house sold three months into our thirteen-year stay in South Africa. The profit from the sale of our house was a meager \$6000. But that \$6000 REPRESENTED SECURITY to me – we could get back home, if we needed to, etc.

*Then the Holy Spirit taught me about “serving Mammon” – **“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”** (Matthew 6:24²²) In this context, Jesus is referring to wealth as money and material possessions which are “stored up” as “treasure”. (Matthew 6:19-20) Whereas Jesus spoke of the Father giving “daily bread”, this was “bread” stored up for*

²¹ Mortgages were being offered at 0% interest for brand new homes which had recently been built in our area, making older homes like ours somewhat less desirable for many buyers.

²² Matthew 6:24; Cf. Luke 16:13.

tomorrow, next week, next month, and for years to come. In other words, a “treasure” REPRESENTING A SOURCE OF SECURITY.²³

I realized that meager \$6000 REPRESENTED SECURITY to me – it was my “ALL”. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”. (Matthew 6:21) My heart was convicted. And although my wife has always had more faith for our material provision, I did learn to “let go and let God” be our Provider. Just to round off that short chapter of our life story, I don’t remember what became of that \$6000; but I do remember that for the thirteen years we “lived by faith”²⁴ in South Africa, our family always had a roof over our heads and never missed a meal.

So, “all” is ALL, but we can divide it into categories for analysis and understanding: We can make a list of **Conventional Life Categories**. These categories can represent the WHOLE of our lives, but I will separate them into three groups only for the purpose of discussion. It is important to note that the order of these categories is admittedly “conventional” – it is not “biblical” – that is, this order does not appear in the scriptures per se. For example, placing Marriage, Family and Occupation before

²³ An excerpt from Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible affirms this understanding: “... these words from the Hebrew *אמן aman*, to trust, confide; because men are apt to trust in riches. Mammon may therefore be considered any thing a man confides in.” This, of course, is a FALSE sense of security. Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:17

²⁴ Because our visas only allowed “religious work”. We were not allowed to take secular employment.

Ministry Calling: While Paul does exhort the Christians to work and support their families,²⁵ we would be hard pressed to find in the gospel accounts this conventional “order of priorities” among Jesus and His disciples.²⁶ But, in any case, let’s discuss the conventional “order of priorities” we have adopted in our western Christian cultures:

A. God

B. Marriage & Family

C. Livelihood (Occupation)

D. Ministry Calling (Serving the Lord)

1. “A” is necessary for spiritual life. “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.” (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4)
2. “B” & “C” are physical necessities for survival. What we are discussing here is that these can be maintained in either a Self-Centered way or a God-Centered way.
3. Some people – and there is a certain validity to it - combine “C” & “D”. That is, they see their occupation as their ministry calling. Personally, this has NOT been my perspective or life experience – except for my years as an overseas missionary, my occupation and my ministry have always

²⁵ 1 Timothy 5:8

²⁶ Matthew 4:20 & 22, 19:27-30; Mark 1:16-20, 10:28; Luke 14:33, 18:28-30

been quite separate. Hopefully, I was a witness for the Lord in my various occupations²⁷; but my ministry has always been teaching the scriptures in various contexts.²⁸

4. “D” might mean serving to meet the needs of people, BUT THIS MUST BE IN THE CONTEXT OF “MEETING GOD’S NEEDS” FIRST AND FOREMOST. “God’s needs” have to do with His cosmic plans and Kingdom purposes in and through THE CHURCH²⁹ - as defined in the scripture, not necessarily as practiced by Christendom throughout history.

There were two things I desired to make clear in this section:

- I. Only Jesus is Lord. Only Jesus can prescribe what “forsaking all” will look like in your life.
- II. “Forsaking all” will look different during different seasons of your life.

²⁷ I’ve earned a living working as a professional musician, a music teacher, a janitor, an office administrator, et. al.

²⁸ I’ve taught the scriptures as a Sunday school teacher, an overseas missionary, an itinerant teacher and conference speaker, church planter, and most recently as a writer – most of the time without pay, but sometimes receiving nominal offerings and allowances.

²⁹ I use the English word “church” to represent the totality of biblical ecclesiology that is meant to be represented in the Greek word “ecclesia”. I don’t think using the Greek word in place of the English word helps the reader to understand the biblical ecclesiology. Such understanding does not reside in an English or Greek word, per se, it comes only through study, teaching and revelation.

Hinderances to Following Jesus

We are discussing things which inhibit the willingness and actuality of “forsaking all” and thereby hinder our “following Jesus”. These things reside first and foremost in individual human hearts and lives, and are consequently prevalent in our societies and cultures. That they typify the non-believer in the World is to be expected. That they remain an issue for professing Christians and also typify the professing Church is what is being addressed in this article. There is a lack of God-Centeredness in the Christian life & Professing Church. I discuss these things in much more detail in my article, [The God-Centered Life](#). Here are just some select comments on Self-Centeredness, Man-Centeredness, The World, and Materialism:

Self-Centeredness

I’ve long taken note of the list of characteristics Paul gives in his letter to Timothy describing people who are living in the last days.³⁰ The list begins with “lovers of self”.³¹ This phrase

³⁰ 2 Timothy 3:1-3

³¹ 2 Timothy 3:1-3

certainly characterizes our times (the Church and those who lead it are far from being exempt). The fact is, this Self-Centeredness has been with us since the Garden.

But why is it that we are naturally self-centered when, in fact, we were created to be God-centered? Let's begin at the beginning where it all began. In the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Book of Genesis, we read about the Fall of Man. I will paraphrase the story:

God said, "I have given you a paradise here. There is the Tree of Life, and there is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. I would like for you to eat of the Tree of Life, but not from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Of course, in order for you to love Me, as I have defined love, I have given you a free will. You are free to choose to disagree with Me and disobey Me.³² But, from My point of view, I am telling you it would be a good thing for you not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is why I say that: I have the Knowledge of Good and Evil and I have created you in My image and likeness. You have been created to be LIKE Me, but not JUST LIKE ME. The difference is

³² Humankind is **free** to love or not love God. Jesus said: "**IF YOU LOVE ME**, keep My commandments." (John 14:15) Many would ask: "Why would God create humankind knowing that they would fall into sin and suffer the sorrowful consequences of sin?" Because He **freely chose** to create and love us, He wanted us to **freely choose** to love Him, even at the risk of our choosing not to, for He had a plan of redemption already in place before the fall into sin. (Revelation 13:8, Ephesians 1:3-6) I discuss this, and other issues related to the will of God and the evil in the world in my article [Some Thoughts on Evil](#).

this: As God, I have the Knowledge of Good and Evil and I can handle it - you can't."

*Then along came the Adversary – the one who hates God – and us. He simply wants to steal, kill and destroy us. That's his nature. He said to Eve: "Sure, God **said** that He loves you and wants the best for you, but He must be holding something back from you and Adam, if He won't let you eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Come over here and just take a look at this tree. **From my point of view**: This is beautiful food that will make you wise." So, Eve took a look at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And **from her point of view**, this looked like a good deal. So, she and her husband ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In so doing, they in as much said to God: "Lord, thanks very much for this paradise, but we feel that if we can just decide for ourselves what we think will be good and evil for us, we will be able to make an even better life for ourselves."*

*We see the results of their choice in the same chapter: they realize they are naked, and now feel like they cannot stand before the Lord and try to hide from His presence. In the next chapter we see that their son, Cain, kills his brother, Abel. When God confronts him about this, his response is: "Am I my brother's keeper?" In other words, he was acting out of his **Self-Centered point of view**.*

Well, as they say: "The rest is history" – the history of **Humanity's hopeless attempt at living independent of God**. With this choice to live independent of God, Mankind put itself in the position of

having to depend upon itself for survival. I think it is plain to see how **Self-Preservation is intrinsically bound up in Self-Centeredness.**

Man-Centeredness

Self-Centeredness and Man-Centeredness are also intrinsically bound together. But we can distinguish them in this way: The term “Self-Centeredness” could be used to describe the individual, and the term “Man-Centeredness” can be used to describe the collective. I am using both terms to describe the condition of the World, as well as the condition of the Professing Church.

In the Professing Church today, it seems that a truly God-Centered perspective is extremely rare; and when it does emerge, it seems very radical indeed. When there is defining "Worship" and "the Kingdom" and "the Church" in terms of what it does for people, there is essentially a Man-Centered (Self-Centered, Fallen) perspective. I am NOT saying that God has no desire to bless people. I am NOT saying that there is no place for Christian compassion or a desire to meet the needs of people. And I am NOT pitting the first great commandment (love God) against the

second great commandment (love others) - I am just pointing out that there is indeed a first and then a second.³³

I think we must admit that the Humanism (Man-Centeredness) that pervades our times has changed the focus of the Professing Church's theology, spirituality, mission, and ministry so that it has become less and less **God-centered**, and more and more **Man-centered**. Evangelicals and Charismatics enjoy talking primarily about what God has done and will do **FOR MAN**. Some Liberals ("Progressives") remind us about what should or must be done **BY MAN**. While Pentecostal and Holiness traditions major on what God has and still desires to do **IN MAN**. None of this is wrong – it is just **OFF-CENTER**. It is **Man-Centered**, instead of **God-Centered**.

Whereas, in his various epistles to the churches, Paul puts forth a very **God-Centered** perspective:

- *“For FROM HIM and THROUGH HIM and TO HIM are all things.”* Romans 11:36
- *“For BY HIM all things were created...all things were created THROUGH HIM and FOR HIM.”* Colossians 1:16

³³ Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27

- “...**HIM, FOR WHOM** are all things and **BY WHOM** are all things.” Hebrews 2:10
- “...**FROM WHOM** are all things, and we exist **THROUGH HIM.**” 1 Corinthians 8:6

We also have the personal testimony and exhortation of Paul and his co-workers: “For the love of Christ compels³⁴ us, having concluded this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might **no longer live for themselves, but for Him** Who died and rose again on their behalf.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

The World

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, **the lust of the flesh** and **the lust of the eyes** and **the boastful pride of life**, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” 1 John 2:15-17

In my article, *The Spirit of the World*³⁵, I discuss this passage in detail, but here I’d like to offer just a few comments. This is what

³⁴ NKJV

³⁵ A complimentary PDF copy can be obtained by emailing AtChristsTable@gmail.com

John wrote: “All that is **in** the world... is **from** the world”³⁶ What all is **in** and **from** the world? John offers three categories:

- 1) the lusts of the flesh
- 2) the lusts of the eyes
- 3) the boastful pride of life

Seeing these things for what they really are helps us to see the world for what it really is. To begin with, it may be helpful to look at how the *Amplified Bible* attempts to bring out the fuller meaning of the Greek words John uses in this verse:

“For all that is in the world — **the lust of the flesh** [craving for sensual gratification] and **the lust of the eyes** [greedy longings of the mind] and **the pride of life** [assurance in one’s own resources or in the stability of earthly things] — these do not come from the Father but are from the world [itself].”

1 John 2:16 The Amplified Bible

The Lusts of the Flesh

³⁶ 1 John 2:16

The Amplified Bible explains the “*lust of the flesh*” as “*cravings for sensual gratification*”. The Phillips translation refers to it as: “Men's primitive desires.”³⁷ Based upon James’ principle, “...when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin”³⁸, I believe it is accurate to say that “*the lusts of the flesh*” correspond to “the deeds of the flesh” – that is, desires in the heart and mind result in sinful actions in the soul and body. There is a partial list of the “**deeds of the flesh**” in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians.³⁹ From this list we see that some lusts and deeds of the flesh are sins of self-indulgence - like the various types of sexual sin, drunkenness, drug abuse, partying. Others lusts and deeds of the flesh are sins of self-exaltation - like hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, conflict, factions, and envy. And still other lusts and deeds of the flesh are sins of self-preservation - like idolatry and selfish ambition.

Each one of these “deeds of the flesh” warrants further attention, but it is not within the scope of this message to go into further detail regarding each one individually. But suffice to say that they fall into these three categories of self-indulgence, self-exaltation, and self-preservation. From this we can see that “self” is a

³⁷ *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Phillips.

³⁸ James 1:15

³⁹ Galatians 5:19-21 (*New American Standard Bible & God’s Word Translation*)

primary focus in the “principles of the world”⁴⁰. This Self-Centeredness is resident in the hearts of fallen human beings who fashion and propagate the culture of the world.

The Lusts of the Eyes

The *Amplified Bible* explains the “*lusts of the eyes*” as “*greedy longings of the mind*”. Phillips translates it as: “their greedy ambitions”.⁴¹ This refers to the ungodly longing for things which we can see. Biblical wisdom literature tells us that “the eyes are never satisfied”.⁴² Paul exhorts us: “Therefore, put to death whatever is worldly in you: your sexual sin, perversion, passion, lust, and greed (which is the same thing as worshiping wealth). It is because of these sins that God’s anger comes on those who refuse to obey him. You used to live that kind of sinful life.”

Colossians 3:5-7⁴³

The word “covetousness” defines this condition. More modern terms would be “greed” and “Materialism”. These terms speak of the tenor of our age – the culture of fallen humanity.

The Boastful Pride of Life

⁴⁰ Galatian 4:3 & 9; Colossians 2:8 & 20

⁴¹ Ibid, J.B. Phillips

⁴² Proverbs 27:20; Ecclesiastes 1:8

⁴³ Cf., Ephesians 5:5-7

John would also have us to be aware of *“the boastful pride of life”*. The Phillips translation refers to it as: "the glamour of all they think splendid."⁴⁴ Most translations render simply “pride of life”; but the *New American Standard Bible* includes an aspect from the root of the Greek word by adding **“boastful”** to “pride of life”.⁴⁵ The word implies “self-confidence”, as well as confidence in earthly, material things, as the *Amplified Bible* brings out with the phrase, “assurance in one’s own resources or in the stability of earthly things”. What is being described here is **putting confidence and trust in one’s personal gifts and talents, money and material possessions, and the accompanying social position and power.**

Either - Or

Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”⁴⁶ He presents an **“either-or” case**. His brother, James, said: “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is

⁴⁴ Ibid, J.B. Phillips

⁴⁵ *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*: (Greek) *alazoneia*.

⁴⁶ Matthew 6:24

hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”⁴⁷ Another case of “either-or”. In the same way, John says: “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”⁴⁸ Another case of “either-or”. In this message, we are considering the explanation as to WHY that is the case.

In the next verse John explains that “All that is in the world ... is **from** the world.” It is not **from** God – it is **from** the culture of fallen humanity. The “principles of the world” are born of, are sourced in, and emerge out of – the culture of fallen humanity. How is it that John had this perspective of the world? This was the perspective given to him by Jesus. In John’s gospel, he records Jesus as saying that while His followers are **in** the world, they are **not of** the world.⁴⁹ According to Jesus, the Christianity He initiated, is **in** the world, but **not of** the world. So, we see that, like Jesus and James, throughout his epistle, John draws very clear lines of demarcation when he speaks in the following terms: “They **went out** from us, but they were not really **of** us; for if they had been **of** us, they would have remained **with** us; but they

⁴⁷ James 4:4

⁴⁸ 1 John 2:15b

⁴⁹ John 17:15-18

went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not **of us**.”⁵⁰ From the apostolic perspective, we are either abiding in life or death.⁵¹ We are in the light or the darkness.⁵² We are either walking in the truth or in error.⁵³ We either have love for the Father or love for the World.⁵⁴ Professing Christendom needs to regain the apostolic perspective.

I think the following quote captures the significance of the “line of demarcation” inherent in John’s command “**Do not love the world**”:

*“This makes it clear why a believer cannot love the world. To love is to be **emotionally invested** in something.... We cannot be totally emotionally invested in two contradictory directions. We chose either God and His values or the world and its values. The natural human desire to be accepted and to “fit in” will not find these verses comfortable ones. The Christian will always live in tension with the world, suspicious of, if not rejecting, much of the product of human culture. The **countercultural** lifestyle of the Christian invites rejection, for living by different values suggests that the values of one’s neighbors are inadequate. The tension is there. The pain is real. **We cannot have it both ways**. We cannot love both God and the world.”⁵⁵*

⁵⁰ 1 John 2:19

⁵¹ 1 John 3:14

⁵² 1 John 2:9

⁵³ 1 John 4:6

⁵⁴ 1 John 2:15

⁵⁵ *The Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 1 John, Peter H. Davids

Materialism

Merriam Webster defines “Materialism” in this way:

“A preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things.” In biblical terms, “Materialism” would be described as: The desire of the eyes for increasing material possessions, motivated by a love and trust in accumulated wealth, and the “pride of life” which follows those desires being satisfied.⁵⁶ Like all social ills, Materialism pervades the social, political, and economic systems of a nation. In other words, it becomes “cultural”. But it is not “systemic” in *origin* – it begins in the individual hearts of those who collectively make up a nation.⁵⁷

I think it an accurate assessment to say that we have seen very little sacrificial living for the Cause of Christ in recent generations. Instead, we see young people⁵⁸ - including young people who identify as Christians - up to their hips in Materialism. Like wading through quicksand, it is hindering their walk with the Lord. I know some young people who would be labeled as “good Christians”.

⁵⁶ Cf. Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:17; 1 John 2:15-16

⁵⁷ A Biblical worldview does not totally reject the reality of “systemic” problems. But it puts forth the more foundational reality that human systems are made by humans and are made up of humans. Therefore, any worthwhile change must begin with spiritual regeneration of individuals. Solely “systemic” solutions are political illusions.

⁵⁸ And older people as well.

But Christianity is much more than morality. And “following Jesus” requires much more than living a moral life. The Christian witness of the younger generations⁵⁹ has failed to address the “Materialism” of the Western culture.

However, during *the Jesus People Movement*⁶⁰ of the 60s & 70s “Materialism” WAS ADDRESSED - in a counter-cultural way. And we did see a fair amount of “*forsaking all to follow Jesus*”, which resulted in sacrificial living for God. I actually haven’t heard it at all recently, but I used to sometimes hear it said, “*Some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good.*”⁶¹ My response would be: “*I haven’t seen one of those people in about forty years!*” Please don’t misunderstand me, I am NOT simply comparing generations. The American young people of the 60s & 70s were certainly no less Self-Centered. Also, I am not advocating a “re-enactment” of the Jesus People Movement – God has moved on.

⁵⁹ And the older generations as well.

⁶⁰ Suggested Reading & Viewing: “*The Jesus People Movement*”, Richard A. Bustraan. “*The Jesus Movement Revisited*”, Brian Zahnd https://brianzahnd.com/2020/10/the-jesus-movement-revisited/?fbclid=IwAR3u_CgYx_M3vAXYHBQR4FiiFq3h1ns1GOp_OC6Qv4RNPNw7FeYbOsAVMIA . “*The Jesus Movement: 40 Years Later*” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEhsyDtlqlg>

⁶¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes is attributed with the quote “Some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good.” The same sentiment found its way into a song by Johnny Cash: “You’re shinin’ your light, and shine it you should. But you’re so heavenly minded you’re no earthly good” (“No Earthly Good,” from *The Rambler*, 1977). For a biblical response to Oliver Wendell Holmes, I would recommend the following article: <https://www.gotquestions.org/heavenly-minded-earthly-good.html>

But we need to take hold of and serve “the purpose of God in (our) generation”. (Acts 13:36) What I would like to consider here is that which was similar and that which was different in the spiritual climates of the 60s & 70s and today. Countless times over the past 45 years I have reflected on what it was that gave birth to such an experiential visitation of God which we have not seen since.⁶² What were things like when God decided to interrupt the business as usual in our society and captivate the hearts and minds of a large number of young people?

What was different is this: The social dynamics which touched the lives of many young people in the 60s & 70s PUSHED THEM OVER THE LINE. Many became motivated to forsake all to follow SOMETHING OTHER THAN THEIR OWN SELF-CENTERED MATERIALISTIC AMBITIONS IN LIFE. What were those things?⁶³ These things are the LEGACY of that move of the Spirit;

⁶² Moves of God are sovereign. We cannot make revival happen. What people call "revivals" in the past 40 years are nothing but marketing events of the Christian industry. There was no such thing in the 70s. I think other examples of God-ordained revivals would be “The Great Awakening” (1740), “The Welsh Revival” (1904), and “The Latter Rain Movement” (1948). It must be noted, however, that even with God-ordained moves of the Spirit, there seems to always develop a mixture of Holy Spirit, demonic spirits and fleshly activities. There is a spiritual “tension” one must adopt: “Do not believe every spirit”; but also “Do not despise prophesyings.” We must discern, judge and separate “the holy from the common”. (Leviticus 10:10; Ezekiel 22:26; 42:20; 44:23)

⁶³ Some of the following is based on a video entitled, “*The Jesus Movement: 40 Years Later*” (2013) ... The reflections of 4 seminary professors who had their Christian beginnings in the

but they are also its ELEMENTS. As such, it could happen again. The tide has gone out - but it will come back in. The condition of the nation's society and culture:

- Unstable times and times of upheaval
- Young people searching for meaning beyond Materialism
- Large numbers of unchurched, skeptical, atheistic people

The witness of the missionaries (not the professing Church):

- CHRIST WAS PRESENTED AND PERCEIVED AS A REVOLUTIONARY
- CHRISTIANITY WAS PRESENTED AND PERCEIVED AS COUNTER-CULTURAL

The immediate spiritual fruit:

- An experiential presence of God
- Holy Spirit re-birth
- A sense of being led by the Spirit
- A great hunger to study the Bible
- Original songs of testimony & short scripture choruses sung in coffee houses
- Evangelistic outreach (that is, outside the church building)

Jesus Movement of the 70s, and who are STILL "Jesus Freaks" at heart.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW1dESsLpBA>

"Forsaking All to Follow Jesus"

WD Furioso ~ At Christ's Table ~ ACTpublications (2021) ~ <https://www.AtChrist'sTable.org>

Large numbers of young people, albeit certainly not all, "decided to follow Jesus"; and for many, this meant "forsaking all". Post-WW2 Materialism certainly existed in the 50s. But somehow, by the 60s & 70s, it had turned sour, becoming not only unsatisfying, but also distasteful to many young people.⁶⁴ That SHOULD HAVE happened again in this generation - but it hasn't – at least, not yet. The Lord will be at work in all things for His purposes (Romans 8:28-29) Maybe we will see another Jesus People Movement.

⁶⁴ I really can only speak for myself, but I have the same impression of most of my friends back in the 70s – I can honestly say, my life goals were NOT about having a good paying job, a comfortable life in the suburbs, financial security, material possessions, etc. – the desires of that generation were literally the opposite of those associated with Materialism. I think that may be very difficult for young people today to believe or understand.

The Way of the Cross

The Path to God-Centeredness

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Church in Colossae, I believe he establishes a foundation for a **God-Centered**, rather than a **Man-Centered philosophy of ministry** – an approach to ministry where the Church focuses on loving and ministering **firstly** to the Lord rather than to itself; and the Lord, Who is love, in turn ministers to the people, both sovereignly, as well as, through one another. J.B. Phillips translates Colossians 1:9 in this way: "We are asking God that you may **see things**, as it were, **from His point of view** by being given spiritual insight and understanding." Now look at verses 17 and 18: "He is **before** all things, and in Him all things **hold together**. He is also **the Head** of the body, the Church; and He is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have **first place** (or "**the preeminence**"⁶⁵) in everything." The Greek word, *proteuo*, means to be **given first place in rank and influence**. "He is **before** all things..." The Greek word, *pro*, means that He is **above, superior** in all things.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *New King James Version*

⁶⁶ The verse goes on to say: "In Him all things **hold together**." The Greek word, *sunistano*, means *are held together, are sustained*. When is it that a marriage, a relationship, a church do not **hold together**? When we do not allow Christ to be **the Head** – when we do not give Him **first place** or the **preeminence**.

Please don't misunderstand me – in advocating a change from Man-Centeredness to God-Centeredness, I am not saying that ministering to the many needs of people is wrong. What is wrong, from a Biblical perspective, is that when ministry to *people* comes **before** ministry to *God*, when the goal of being **held together with one another** comes before being **held together with God**, and when the desires of *people* occupy **first place** on the agenda, when it is the Lord Who should have the **preeminence**, then things are not merely “out of order”, but we have a people who give lip service rather than their hearts to God⁶⁷, “having (an outward) form of godliness, but have denied the (inward) power” (which would make the godliness a reality).⁶⁸

I do think this characterizes the professing Church; and those who lead it are far from being exempt. Our essential spiritual need is a **CHANGE** from a **Self-Centered** to a **God-Centered** point of view. This **CHANGE** is a process⁶⁹, but it has a definite beginning. And the beginning is theologically referred to as ***repentance***. The Greek word translated ***repentance*** is: *metanoeo*⁷⁰. It is a

⁶⁷ Isaiah 29:13; 48:1-2

⁶⁸ 2 Timothy 3:5

⁶⁹ Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification

⁷⁰ Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible # 3340 and Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words.

combination of two words: *meta*, which means to *change*; and *noeo*, which means to *perceive*. Fundamentally, we need a **change of perception** – we need to **change our point of view** – from a **Self-Centered** to a **God-Centered** point of view. And [The Way of the Cross](#) has been provided by God to accomplish this work in fallen humanity.

What do we mean by “The Cross”?

But what exactly do we mean by “The Cross”? The first mention of “the cross” in the Bible is spoken by Jesus Himself:

“And He said to all, If any person wills to come after Me, let him **deny himself** [disown himself, forget, lose sight of himself and his own interests, refuse and give up himself] and take up his **cross** daily and follow Me cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying also].”⁷¹

Jesus is “the Author and Perfector of faith”⁷² and He defined “the cross” in terms of **“denying self”**. According to Jesus, a second aspect of the definition of “the cross” is that it is **“for the glory of the Father”**. In His prayer to the Father just before His arrest and

⁷¹ Luke 9:23 *The Amplified Bible*

⁷² Hebrews 12:2

crucifixion, Jesus said: “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I came to this hour. **Father, glorify Your name** " Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."⁷³

One insidious danger associated with desiring to walk [The Way of the Cross](#) is falling into the trap of *taking pride in our self-denial*. This does not glorify the Father, but instead, ironically, leads to self-glorification. This type of spiritual pride is in direct contradiction to [The Way of the Cross](#).

A third aspect of the definition of “the Cross” is that it is “daily”, as Jesus said that we were to “take up our cross **daily** and follow Him”. That is, [The Way of the Cross](#) is not some kind of single special act of spectacular sacrifice which may even bring notoriety and popularity; but rather, The Way of the Cross is a daily lifestyle of self-denial – usually in ways that may go totally unnoticed except by God.

⁷³ John 12:27-28

We need to make a distinction between the “Work of the Cross” and the “Way of the Cross”⁷⁴: The “Work of the Cross” is Christ’s sacrificial work on the Cross as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the World”.⁷⁵ The message of the “Work” of the Cross is directed to the unconverted – the “old man”.⁷⁶ The “Way of the Cross” is Christ’s example which He gave to the “new man”⁷⁷ – namely, those who “come after Him...and follow Him,⁷⁸ who “cleave steadfastly to Him, and conform wholly to His example”,⁷⁹ who “take the same road with Him that He takes as a habit of life”.⁸⁰

A Summary

Our theme, which is much more developed in my article, [The God-Centered Life](#) is this: Self-Centeredness is the resulting human condition from the Fall. God’s method of rectification is the Work of the Cross of Christ and [The Way of the Cross](#) in our

⁷⁴ We can understand the soteriology (theology of salvation) this way: Jesus’ “WORK of the Cross” accomplishes Justification; and the Holy Spirit’s “Way of the Cross” accomplishes Sanctification.

⁷⁵ John 1:29

⁷⁶ Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9

⁷⁷ Ephesians 2:15, 4:24; Colossians 3:10

⁷⁸ Luke 9:23 *New American Standard Bible*

⁷⁹ Luke 9:23 *The Amplified Bible*

⁸⁰ Luke 9:23 *The Wuest Expanded Translation*

lives. The “all” referenced here is that which we possess and preserve for our “selves”.⁸¹ [The Way of the Cross](#) – which is the way of self-denial and self-sacrifice - displaces the “all” and reinstates God in THE CENTER of our lives so that EVERYTHING in our lives revolves around Him. I use the word “reinstates”, because God’s intention in creation is that, through Christ, IN EVERYTHING He would have THE PREEMINENCE and be THE CENTER of our lives.⁸²

This process takes place in an initial “crisis experience”, which we call “conversion” and/or “surrender”;⁸³ and continues throughout our lives through other “crises experiences” and continued surrendering: As we follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit will “invite” us to voluntarily enter into circumstances and situations (for example, answering a call to a foreign mission field) – or allows circumstances and situations to come upon us (for example, any type of loss which life may bring our way) – in which we must respond positively or negatively. (In [The Way of the Cross](#), our response is always our free-will choice.) **These are “crises**

⁸¹ The idea that we ACTUALLY possess and preserve anything is an illusion which is exposed at some point during our life or at the time of death.

⁸² Colossians 1:15-19

⁸³ In the context of “repentance”, as we have defined it.

experiences” in which we are confronted with the choice of whether we will forsake – “consider”, “calculate the cost”, “sell”, “hate”, “give up”, “leave” – “all” and continue to follow Jesus on His path of discipleship.

The process of these on-going “crisis experiences” in the life of a disciple is called “spiritual growth and formation” and/or “sanctification”. “Consecration” is yet another term which we use to describe this process. But the literal meaning of the Greek word is being SEPARATED AND SET APART TO GOD.⁸⁴ Now, this act of “separation” and “setting apart” is INITIATED by God – it is a work of God.⁸⁵ But the scriptures also speak of the need for us to MAINTAIN the *positional truth* of this condition with *experiential truth*⁸⁶ by *pursuing holiness*⁸⁷. So, the issue at hand is this: **What are we giving our “selves” over to – God, or the “all” He calls us to forsake?**

⁸⁴ Greek: *hagiasmos*, Strong’s # 38, Cf. *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

⁸⁵ Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; 5:26

⁸⁶ Galatians 1:16; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:8-10

⁸⁷ Romans 6:22; Hebrews 12:14. Again, the root meaning of “holiness” is being “separated” or “set apart” as being owned by and belonging to God.

“Meeting God’s Needs”

His Eternal Plans & Purposes

Eternal

A defining attribute of God is that He is Eternal.⁸⁸ A quintessential characteristic of anything of God is its eternal characteristic. For example, God Himself, His word, His salvation, and His righteousness “will never pass away”, but “will endure forever”.⁸⁹ And the glory⁹⁰ that Jesus referred to as having with the Father – whatever that is – it is eternal, for Jesus spoke of it as having been there from eternity past and will be there for eternity future.⁹¹ THAT is the God we have entered into relationship with. And THAT is the God we must learn to co-labor with⁹². The issues are: What is God doing? And what are we doing? Are we working WITH God in His eternal plans and purposes? Or ...

Are we working on things which are merely temporal?

⁸⁸ Everlasting – no beginning and no end. Romans 1:20; Cf. Genesis 1:1; Exodus 3:14; Psalm 90:2; John 1:1, 8:58

⁸⁹ Isaiah 40:8, 51:6; Psalm 119:152; Matthew 24:35; Luke 21:33

⁹⁰ I understand glory of God to be the expression of who He is – the radiance or out-showing of His nature, character, and attributes. See my article [Some Thoughts on the Glory of God](#).

⁹¹ Cf. John 17:24

⁹² 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Cf. Mark 16:20

In Ecclesiastes 3:11 Solomon wrote: “He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set **eternity** in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.” I believe we can understand Solomon to be saying something like this: *“It seems like there is a purpose to creation⁹³, and although Man cannot totally understand it now, God has created him such that it is his very nature to want to know and understand God’s eternal plans and purposes in creation.”* *The Amplified Bible* says it this way: “He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy]....” *The Young’s Literal Translation* actually offers a hope for some “satisfaction”, as it were, even during our time on earth. It reads like this: “... that knowledge He hath put in their heart without which man findeth not out the work that God hath done from the beginning even unto the end.” I believe that **God wants us to understand His Eternal Plans and Purposes in Creation.**⁹⁴ I believe this simply because He has revealed it in the Scripture: In Ephesians 1:4-5, Paul states: “Even **before the world was made**, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love

⁹³ See the preceding verses 1-10 in Ecclesiastes 3.

⁹⁴ I believe God wants us to know “what” His plans and purposes are, though we may not know “how” He will accomplish His plans and purposes. Shortly, I’ll address this difference between “what” and “how”.

God had already decided that through Jesus Christ, he would make us his children – this was his pleasure and purpose.⁹⁵

We'll return to this passage shortly.

Seeing from God's Point of View

But the phrase “before the world was made” indicates to us that in order to properly understand God's *Eternal Plans and Purposes in Creation*, we must see from the *divine perspective* – we must *See from God's Point of View* – that is, from an **eternal perspective**. Therefore, in order to address the topic of “*His Eternal Plans and Purposes*”, we need to investigate *God's intention – His plans and purposes in Creation*. And in order to properly understand this, we need to *See Things from God's Point of View*. And in order to have *God's Point of View*, we need to adopt *His eternal perspective*.

I don't think it should be difficult for us to acknowledge that we all tend to be more Man-Centered than God-Centered, see things from a self-centered point of view rather than from God's point of view, and give much more thought to the affairs of this life than eternity. These things hinder us from truly co-laboring with the

⁹⁵ *Good News Translation*

Lord. **God's perspective is an eternal one.** *Man's perspective is temporal.* Scripture⁹⁶ tells us that *what we see is "temporal"*, but **what we don't see – namely, God and the things of God - are "eternal"**. "Temporal"⁹⁷ means *enduring for a while, for a season.* If we want to know where it all came from and where it is all going, we need *an eternal perspective* – namely, an understanding of that which was in the heart and mind of God BEFORE creation and will remain AFTER the earth passes away.⁹⁸

Along with this eternal perspective, *Seeing from God's Point of View* requires our **agreeing with and submitting to God's perspective** on things. We must "sit where God is sitting", as it were, and look outward and "see what God is seeing", in order to see and understand things from *His point of view*. This puts God where He rightfully belongs in our lives – **IN THE CENTER**. Job asked: "Where then does wisdom come from? And where is this place of understanding?" (Job 28:20) *God's point of view* on things is given to us by God's Spirit in the Bible (God's words). If we agree with and submit to a biblical perspective on things, we

⁹⁶ *I Corinthians 4:18*

⁹⁷ (Greek) *proskairos*: Strong's # 4340

⁹⁸ Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33, II Peter 3:10-13

will have *a God-Centered point of view* and not a Man-Centered point of view. This is absolutely necessary to understand God and *His Eternal Plans and Purposes*, in which there is a place for each of His children and includes their personal lives. We can therefore appreciate Paul's Spirit-motivated prayer for the Church:

**“We are asking God that you may see things,
as it were, from His point of view
by being given spiritual insight and understanding.”⁹⁹**

“Working together with Him”¹⁰⁰

The deliverance from Self-Centeredness, Man-Centered-ness, the World and Materialism is certainly God's sovereign work through the Cross of Christ; yet it involves our surrender and co-operation. So how can we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit?

Firstly, we must realize that “following Jesus” has all to do with His Kingdom – that is, seeing the kingdom, entering the kingdom, growing in the kingdom, working in the kingdom, bearing fruit in

⁹⁹ Colossians 1:9 *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Phillips

¹⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1

the kingdom, and remaining faithful in the kingdom here on Earth until Jesus returns. (Cf. Luke 19:11-26) This is the calling and mission of the Church. See the connection for yourself – read what are called the *Parables of the Kingdom* in Matthew 13, particularly noting the term “disciple of the kingdom” in v. 52. (Cf. Luke 9:57-62; John 3:3-8) I point this out to say that discipleship is not merely living a good moral life – it is “SERVING THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN YOUR GENERATION”¹⁰¹ and that “purpose” has to do with His Eternal Plans & Purposes for His Kingdom and His Church.

Secondly, we must understand that all things pertaining to His Kingdom, and by extension, His Church have the Earmark of Eternity.

“Your name be honored as holy, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”¹⁰²

Something which scripture informs us of about the Kingdom of God is that it is an Eternal Kingdom. The writer of the *Letter to the Hebrews* distinguished the Kingdom of God from the things of

¹⁰¹ Acts 13:52

¹⁰² Matthew 6:9b-10 *Holman Christian Standard Bible*

earth by saying created things are “shakable” and temporal, whereas the Kingdom of God is “unshakable” and eternal.

(Cf. Hebrews 12:27-28)

Both John and Peter, reminded us that this world is “passing away” (1 John 2:17), and on the Day of the Lord, this present world will be utterly destroyed. (2 Peter 3:7-10¹⁰³). So, it would do us well to review the nature of God’s Kingdom and the nature of the Church and be reminded that God’s Eternal Plans and Purposes are not limited to meeting the needs of people in their present lives here on this earth:

- “My kingdom is not of this realm.” (John 18:36)
- “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20)
- “The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”
(Romans 14:17)
- “⁴Coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by people but is choice and precious in the

¹⁰³ I am not unaware of the interpretation of this being a “cleansing” rather than a “destroying” fire; but I find this interpretation based solely on a spurious translation of the word *katakaio* (Strong’s 2618) as meaning “discovered” rather than ‘destroyed’, and totally contradicts what is plainly communicated in the rest of the passage.

sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

(1 Peter 2:5 & 9)

- "²² You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant." (Hebrews 12:22-24)

Paul exhorted us to "Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; **BECAUSE the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**" (2 Corinthians 4:18) Temporal things are seen. Eternal things are not seen. When asked about His kingdom Jesus said it "is not of this realm" (John 18:36); and that it "could not be seen" (Luke 17:20-23). This is because His Kingdom is eternal.¹⁰⁴ Like His Kingdom, God's *plans and purposes* in and through the Church are *eternal* and are therefore "not seen". I understand

¹⁰⁴ Daniel 7:14, 27; Revelation 11:15; Cf. Exodus 15:18

that the Church is a witness of the Kingdom to all nations¹⁰⁵, and therefore by nature of the case, its witness is visible. This is true. But God's plans and purposes in and through the Church are NOT VISIBLE to us.

Solomon said: "He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set **eternity** in their heart, YET SO MAN WILL NOT FIND OUT THE WORK WHICH GOD HAS DONE from the beginning even to the end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11) As I said, I believe God wants us to know "*what*" His plans and purposes are, though we may not know "*how*" He will accomplish His plans and purposes. Notice that we are discussing the work GOD DOES. There's a difference between knowing "*what*" God wants to do and knowing exactly "*how*" He is going to do it. The difference is significant BECAUSE WHEN WE THINK WE KNOW HOW TO DO GOD'S WORK, WE ATTEMPT TO DO IT FOR HIM, and that is one way of explaining all the mistakes throughout the history of the Church. The fact is, Jesus already told us we do not know "*how*" His kingdom comes in His *Parable of the Seed*.

"26And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27and he goes to bed at night and gets up daily, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10; Acts 1:8

himself does not know. **28**The soil produces crops by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. **29**Now when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” (Mark 4:6-29)

Thirdly, we must be convinced that the work of God is the work of His Spirit¹⁰⁶. And regarding the moving of the Spirit Jesus said: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but **you do not know** where it is coming from and where it is going.”¹⁰⁷ (John 3:8) In the same way, like Moses “in the cleft of the rock”, we can only see the glory of God “as it passes by”.¹⁰⁸ It is the work of God, and we are not privy to its beginning and end. The Lord has said: “*I will not yield My glory to another.*” (Isaiah 48:11) And considering the Lord’s response to Uzzah, we would do well to not “touch the glory as it passes by”.¹⁰⁹

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!”

(Psalm 115:1 ESV)

Yet the Lord Jesus has commissioned us to “work together with Him” while we are on the earth. So, we need to:

¹⁰⁶ Our role is to believe in Him. John 6:29

¹⁰⁷ Even today’s meteorologists can only estimate the general area in which a wind begins and a general area where it will end, but not its specific beginning and end points.

¹⁰⁸ Exodus 33:22

¹⁰⁹ 1 Chronicles 13:9-12; 2 Samuel 6:6-7. Cf. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Uzzah.html>

1) Know *“what”* He has commissioned us to do – even though we cannot know exactly *“how”* He works and accomplishes His plans and purposes through us.

2) *Give the Holy Spirit the freedom to do “the work of God”.*

This includes believing in (trusting in, having faith in, depending upon, leaning upon)¹¹⁰ God’s Spirit rather than our organized efforts, methodologies, and technologies – and in this way, are being careful not “touch His glory”.

It is not within the scope of this article to deal with the details of the Lord’s commission for the Church of the Kingdom, but suffice to say here, we are to:

- *“Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom”*
- *“Make Disciples of the Kingdom”*
- *“Bear Fruit”*
- *“Be Engaged with Matters of the Kingdom”*

This is the Calling of the Church and the purpose for the Gatherings of the Ecclesia. I have dealt with these things in much detail in two other articles: [The Vineyard of the Lord](#), [The Husbandman](#), and [Concerning Gathering](#).

¹¹⁰ John 6:29. Greek: *pisteuo*, Strong’s # 4100

We Belong to God

“The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.” (Psalm 14:2)

I believe that in Exodus 19:4-6 God told us what it is that He wants us to understand about His Eternal Plans and Purposes: He set us free from the bondage of this world and “bore us on eagles’ wings and brought us to Himself.... to be a special treasure to Himself”¹¹¹. He did this because He has always desired to have *a people* who would be “*a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation*”. In other words: God desires a Church¹¹² - that is, a people set apart from all other people - who would minister, not only to one another, but primarily to Him – a people who are His “special treasure”. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul wrote that God has “an inheritance in the saints”. Observe some of the various translations¹¹³ of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, verse 11 about the Church:

¹¹¹ New King James Version: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

¹¹² Again, I use the English word “church” to represent the totality of biblical ecclesiology that is meant to be represented in the Greek word “ecclesia”. I don’t think using the Greek word in place of the English word helps the reader to understand the biblical ecclesiology. Such understanding does not reside in an English or Greek word, per se, it comes only through study, teaching and revelation.

¹¹³ The Logos International Study Bible, Thomas Nelson, 1972.

- “We were made a heritage”
- “We were also made His inheritance”
- “We have also been chosen as God’s portion”
- “We were also made God’s portion”

WE BELONG TO GOD. That’s what sanctification is – *separated, set apart, consecrated and dedicated to God*. Paul reminds us: “You are not your own. You have been bought for a price. Glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) God desires us. And because we have been bought with a price, and are not our own, Paul exhorts us that *while still in the body*, in which the Holy Spirit dwells, we are to “*glorify God*”. (1 Corinthians 6:20) So basically, we need to ask ourselves: “*What is it that glorifies God?*” What glorifies God is that which serves His Eternal Plans and Purposes?

God’s “Needs”

It may sound a bit strange to speak of “*Meeting God’s Needs*”. He’s God. He doesn’t *need* anything. Right? True, in one sense – from a human perspective. But what about from God’s perspective? Although it is being used in a different sense, I use the concept of “need” to communicate that which is necessary for

God to accomplish His desires. He has plans and purposes and “needs” HIS DESIRES TO BE MANIFESTED TO FULFILL HIS INTENTION FOR THE CHURCH OF HIS KINGDOM.

As we have established that the divine perspective – that is, *Seeing from God’s Point of View* – shows us something crucially important: The divine intention - *God’s Eternal Plans and Purposes* - go way beyond meeting Man’s needs. Firstly, God does not exist for Man (Man-Centeredness); Man exists for God (God-Centeredness). Secondly, the divine intention - *God’s Eternal Plans and Purposes* go back **before** time – **before** the creation – **before** Man fell into sin in the garden – and **before** the Father sent the Son to this earth to redeem Man from sin. Does it sound right to you, that God created Man so that He could redeem him from sin – end of story? Was that God’s Eternal Plan and Purpose? Don’t we just know in our hearts that our God had something much better than that in His heart and mind?

Author and theologian, Simon Chan¹¹⁴, asks: *“Is the church to be seen as an instrument to accomplish God’s purpose in creation, or is the church the expression of God’s ultimate purpose itself?”* He then goes on to say: *“God created the world in order that He might enter into a covenant relationship with humankind.... The covenantal*

¹¹⁴ Editor of the Asian Journal of Theology

*relationship always involves **the election of a people from among humankind**.... Implied in this newer canonical narrative is another way of looking at the relationship between the church broadly conceived and creation, and that is to see it not as another entity within the larger creation but as prior to creation. The church precedes creation in that it is what God has in view from all eternity and creation is the means by which God fulfills his eternal purpose in time. The church does not exist to fix a broken creation; rather, the creation exists to realize the church."¹¹⁵*

I concur: The Creator existed before the Creation. The Creator has a purpose for His Creation: "... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."¹¹⁶ God's purpose for Creation is to form a people – "the adoption as sons", that is, the Church.

Let's look at Paul's words again using a different translation:

"Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ, he would make us his

¹¹⁵ Excerpt from: Chan, Simon (2006) *The Ontology of the Church*, Chapter One, *Liturgical Theology, The Church as Worshiping Community*. InterVarsity Press. Cf. Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8.

¹¹⁶ Ephesians 1:4-5

children—this was his pleasure and purpose."¹¹⁷ The divine intention - God's Eternal Plan and Purpose is to have **A FAMILY OF SONS IN THE SON**. While redeeming us from sin was necessary for God to fulfill His intention, it is not His **Eternal Plan and Purpose**. And if we only have this Man-Centered, needs-oriented perspective – that God's main pre-occupation is in redeeming, saving, healing, and blessing Mankind, then, not only have we missed His intention, but our understanding of the whole of the Christian life, the nature, mission and ministry of the Church will all be askew with a Self-Centered perspective.

So, the divine intention – God's Eternal Plan and Purpose was to "make us his children" — a family of sons in The Son – "THIS WAS HIS PLEASURE AND PURPOSE." In Revelation 4:11, we see that around the throne in heaven it is being declared: "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created."¹¹⁸

So, God has an Eternal Plan and Purpose for His Kingdom; and in love He has chosen to have a partner in the out-working of that

¹¹⁷ Ephesians 1:4-5 *The Good News Translation*

¹¹⁸ *New Living Translation*

"Forsaking All to Follow Jesus"

plan and purpose, and that partner is the Church He is building – **“the Ecclesia”**, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession”¹¹⁹, “Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable angels in festal gathering, the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven”¹²⁰...

“The Bride of Christ”¹²¹.

“^{9b} Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice.

¹⁰ My beloved speaks and says to me: ‘Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.’”

(Song of Solomon 2:9b-10)

“Come follow Me.”

“^{9b} At your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

¹⁰ Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear:

forget your people and your father's house,

¹¹ and the king will desire your beauty.

Since he is your lord, bow to him.”

(Psalm 45:9b-11)

Forsake all and Follow Jesus.

¹¹⁹ 1 Peter 2:9

¹²⁰ Hebrews 12:22-23

¹²¹ Ephesians 5:25-27, 32; Revelation 19:7

“Forsaking All to Follow Jesus”

Addendum

The Kingdom – What Does It Cost?

29” And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. **30** For all these things are what the nations of the world eagerly seek; and your Father knows that you need these things. **31** But seek His kingdom, and these things will be provided to you. **32** Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father has chosen to give you the kingdom.”
(Luke 12:29-32)

Here Jesus is saying: *“Don’t worry about the everyday affairs and cares of this life¹²², your Father has you covered. Just seek His kingdom and what you need will be provided. In fact, your Father wants to **GIVE** you the kingdom.”* So, we see that for God’s children (the “little flock”) the kingdom is FREE – no cost.

How do we reconcile that with other things Jesus said just a few pages later in Luke’s gospel about “calculating the COST” and “forsaking all”?¹²³ Is the kingdom free? Or do we have to “pay” for it? Just a few more pages into Luke’s gospel, Jesus gives us more understanding of the matter:

¹²² Which Jesus also mentioned in His *Parable of the Sower* (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14) and Paul which referred to in his epistle to Timothy (2 Timothy 2:4)

¹²³ Luke 14:28-33. Cf. Matthew 13:44-46

28 "Peter said, 'Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You.' **29** And He said to them, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, **30** who will not **receive many times as much at this time**, and in the age to come, eternal life.'" (Luke 18:29-30)

You see, Jesus is asking for "all", but we are not "buying" the kingdom. **It's a TRADE-OFF - an EXCHANGE - a giving up of one thing in return for another.** (Merriam Webster) It is very clear in Mark's gospel: **29**"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the gospel **30** will fail **to receive a hundredfold in the present age – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, along with persecutions** – and in the age to come, eternal life."

(Mark 10:29-30)

As we "deny our self"¹²⁴ – *trade* our will for the will of God, *trade* our mind for the mind of Christ, *trade* our personal feelings for the fruit of the Spirit – as we stop trying to "save our life" and "lose our life for His sake", we will actually "find our life"¹²⁵ – that is, the EXCHANGED LIFE He offers us.

¹²⁴ Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23

¹²⁵ Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24, 17:33; Cf. John 12:24-26

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As I have tried to point out, this not only applies to our inner life of the will, mind, and emotions, but at certain times also our outer life of family, homes, occupations, etc. And, we have not “arrived” – that is, we are still “in process” - I can assure you this from past personal experience: When the Lord asked us for an “across the board” forsaking all to follow Him – that is, actually leaving behind, our families, home, and occupations:

- He *firstly* addressed our denying our selves – our inner lives – our will, mind, and emotions.
- Over a period of about 3 years, in various ways, He uniquely introduced us to the idea of forsaking our “outer lives” - family, home and occupation - before we actually “left all to follow Him” into a foreign country.
- The “newness of life”¹²⁶ we received in exchange was exactly as He said, but beyond what we could have imagined.
- Absolutely no regrets! Amen.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Romans 6:4

¹²⁷ For more on our personal testimony of “Forsaking All to Follow Jesus”, see [Our Story: for the Cause of Christ](#).

Postscript

Some “food for thought” from Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹²⁸ ...

“If we would follow Jesus, we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence. The call to follow at once produces a new situation. To stay in the old situation makes discipleship impossible. Levi must leave the receipt of custom and Peter his nets in order to follow Jesus. One would have thought that nothing so drastic was necessary at such an early stage. Could not Jesus have initiated the publican into some new religious experience, and leave them as they were before? He could have done so, had he not been the incarnate Son of God. But since he is the Christ, he must make it clear from the start that his word is not an abstract doctrine, but the re-creation of the whole life of man.

The only right and proper way is quite literally to go with Jesus. The call to follow implies that there is only one way of believing on Jesus Christ, and that is by leaving all and going with the incarnate Son of God.

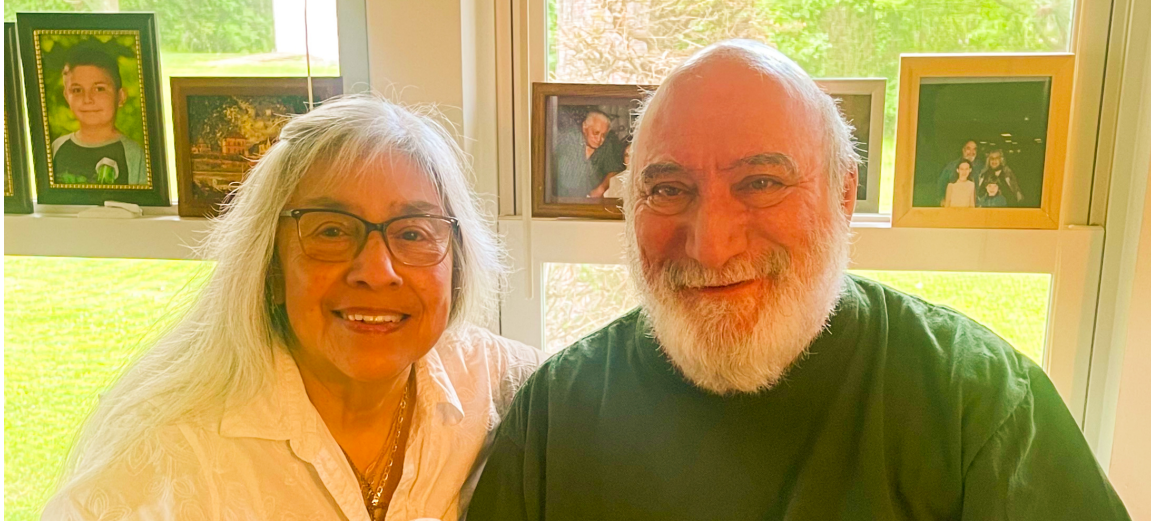
The first step places the disciple in the situation where faith is possible. If he refuses to follow and stays behind, he does not learn how to believe.

He who is called must go out of his situation in which he cannot believe, into the situation in which, first and foremost, faith is possible. But this step is not the first step of a career. Its sole justification is that it brings the disciple into fellowship with Jesus which will be victorious. So long as Levi sits at the receipt of custom, and Peter at his nets, they could both pursue their trade honestly and dutifully, and they might both enjoy religious experiences, old and new. But if they want to believe in God, the only way is to follow his incarnate Son.”

¹²⁸ From *The Cost of Discipleship*.

“Forsaking All to Follow Jesus”

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, disciplined many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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