

The Church of My Dreams Preface

I am convinced that a large number of believers in many lands have a God-given desire to see a breakthrough from the impasse of today's best standards of Church life into a place where the Lord Jesus Christ is so wonderfully glorified in His people that all the earth takes startled notice of God's reigning presence in and among His people. It would be no surprise for me to discover that even close friends take exception to some of the revolutionary things expressed in this book. However, I trust that they, and other readers, will have such deep longing to be part of a "radiant church without stain or blemish, but that is holy and blameless" that they will not quickly or lightly discard what may appear to be radical or wrong. Surely even the slightest possibility of a new way forward being provided and revealed by the Holy Spirit calls for serious praying over and pondering of issues that could conceivably bring amazing changes to the Church of God. Let me earnestly advise you of the danger of attempting to put into practice any of the teaching that is contained in this book. Please take no steps towards doing so unless and until you are clearly directed by the Holy Spirit to do so. Otherwise, you will undermine the main purpose of this book. To put these truths from the heart of the Father into practice, without a deep and inner heart conviction, would produce yet another religious system that would also hinder His purposes. May your journey into the ways of God contained herein be a happy and rewarding adventure and may the precious Holy Spirit Himself aid you in discovering new areas of delight and fulfilment in the King and His Kingdom, so that you receive from Him both the desire and the capacity to walk in the wonderful new dimensions of God's purposes for His people today.

THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH

Chapter One

It was very, very real. It was a dream, a God-given dream! I was sitting in a draughtsman's office. Voices behind me were demanding that I draw a map of Ireland. Naturally, I protested, "I can't do that! How could you expect me to draw accurately a map of a land that is not my native New Zealand, even though I love Ireland dearly?"

2 In fact, I can't even accurately draw a map of my home country and I very much doubt if many people could. The voices were insistent. They thundered at me as though coming through an echo chamber, "You must draw a map of Ireland!" I wanted to escape, but an awareness gripped me that I was locked into a situation from which there was no way out until I did what was being demanded of me. I was trapped! From behind me hands reached out, slapping large sheets of cardboard onto the sloping drawing board at which I was sitting. A green sheet appeared over my left shoulder, while a voice exclaimed, "You will need a board of this colour." From over my right shoulder came a red sheet of cardboard. "This is the correct colour to use," a different voice stressed. Other coloured sheets appeared, purple, brown and black. To me it made no difference what colour the sheet in front of me was. I simply sat there feeling quite helpless, repeating, "I can't do it!" But the demand kept thundering at me, "Draw a map of Ireland." In my dream I cried out to God for help. "Father, they are demanding that I draw a map of Ireland. I can't do it! Please show me way out of this impossible situation!" Astonishingly a divine reply came, spoken softly and yet unmistakeably, "John, draw a map of Ireland. I want you to draw a map of spiritual Ireland. "Lord, that is even worse!" How can anyone draw a map of spiritual Ireland?" How can anyone draw a spiritual map of any land? Now, there seemed to be a sheet of pure white card in front of me. As I looked at it two very small pinpoints of light appeared on the white card. I seemed to know what to do, and forthwith picked up a pencil and ruler. With these I drew a line joining the two points of light. No sooner was the light drawn than the points of light vanished. But two more appeared in different places. I joined these with a pencil line, and immediately they disappeared, just as the first two had done. With a carefree attitude, feeling, "I may as well enjoy myself since I cannot draw what has been demanded of me," I joined dots of light wherever they appeared. There were two dots of light towards the top of my board that were a problem. As soon as I attempted to place a ruler to them they jumped a few inches away. When I replaced the ruler to the new position they moved again! Eventually they stayed still long enough for me to be able to join them. When no more pinpoints of light showed up on the board I sensed that the task was complete. Moving back a little from the board I was amazed to recognize that the drawing of lines was in the shape of a huge diamond. There was greater amazement yet! Wonder and awe gripped me as the drawing came alive. It seemed literally to become a huge, magnificent, glorious diamond. It seemed to me that, if all the diamonds in all the world were somehow brought together and made into one, they would pale before what I was seeing, not only because of its size, but also because of its splendour and perfection! 3 How very amazing! Was this God's perspective of the Church in Ireland? Does God so measure and treasure what to man's perspective seems very imperfect, marred by deeply entrenched traditions, carnal factionalism, and so much smallness, bigotry and selfishness? I awoke from the dream with certain understandings placed within me by the Holy Spirit. The dots of light, mostly concealed, represent followers of Jesus in Ireland who are marked by three characteristics. Firstly, they are believers who have a heart for God's glory to

such an extent that they are not motivated by the desire for personal recognition, honour or gain. They are each willing to be "a God – filled nobody" who cannot rest content until Jesus is honoured as "King of all Ireland" They have come to a place of unsatisfied satisfaction in our dear Lord Jesus Christ. Our precious Lord highly values those who have a heart for God's glory, and a reliance on His grace. For a true manifestation of God's glory, man's hiddenness is most surely essential. Then also, these dear ones have a deep, persistent longing for a better day in Ireland - both for the Church and the nation. We have heard the Holy Spirit calling the people of God to reach out in faith for "a new day for Ireland, and a new way for the Church." These are such a people. Thirdly, these precious people live in the freshness of an intimate love walk with Jesus. Consequently, they are able to experience a certainty of faith in God to bring about the fulfilment of the desires He has placed within them. How favoured a land, where such simplicity, purity, consistency and quality of godliness can be found! How blessed are the hidden believers who experience this quality of life because of their truly Christ-centred living, and because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit who controls their lives. In the dream I was very bothered and frustrated by these pinpoints of light that kept moving. I pray that neither my life nor yours may ever need to be thus typified. This would not be because I travel a great deal, but because of a lack of consistency in my walk for God, and lack of openness to all of His purposes. Such lacks can exist because of the fear of man, because of the blinding personal prejudice or because of some character flaw in which one is not eager for the Holy Spirit to do a purifying work. Thank God for His abounding grace, which can keep a pinpoint of light exactly where He chooses it to be! Thank God for sufficient grace for every one of us to live consistently God-glorifying lives regardless of circumstance or our particular present level of maturity. I also awoke with an understanding that the pencil lines that connected the points of light had nothing whatever to do with rules and regulations. The pencil lines also may or may not have anything to do with the systems and leadership structure with which men (at times even well-intentioned men) have brought to God's people. Their so-called conformity, which is really malformity, hinders God's plan in the earth. These pencil lines also may not have anything to do with groupings of people who "relate to," "submit to," or "identify with" certain leaders, doctrines or denominational entities. Only as leaders are tuned to the heart of our Lord, and move according to His plan, do such externals have meaning. There are some leaders who act as though the lines of relationship in the Body of Christ are merely what join their "stream" or denomination. I think that they may even draw the lines as spokes of a wheel moving out from their ministry and their church! Perhaps the strands of a spider's web may be a more accurate picture! 4 I still carry the certainty of Holy Spirit revelation that these lines are purely in the realm of the Spirit as God alone sees His Church. The Holy Spirit has a unique way of joining heart to heart where "deep calls to deep" / in the roar of (divine) waterfalls; / (and) all (God's) waves and breakers have swept over (us). There are other precious things about this dream that have since become clear to me. When we were in Durban, South Africa, I awoke in the middle of the night with a question in my mind. What a blessing! It was a simple question conveying a blessed and profound truth. This was the question: "What man can build a diamond?" How delightful and reassuring this statement of our wonderfully precious Lord Jesus. "I will build my Church." In this He has promised to build His Church. I cringe to hear people sing, "In my church, Lord, be glorified today," or to hear people talk about "Our assembly" or "Our fellowship." It is so certain that whatever man builds will pass away. Only what God builds will last forever. Let us be certain that we understand it is His House, His Body being built for His Glory. We are all grateful and

humble participants in that which is His work alone. Let so-called "experts" try to build the Church of God with all of their human resources and abilities. Their efforts will be in vain! A major realm in which God is shaking what can be shaken in many nations today, "so that what cannot be shaken may remain," is the realm of manmade and man-controlled church life. Bless Him for that! Using coloured sheets of cardboard to draw spiritual Ireland would obviously express the shades of human prejudice, influence and imperfect and inadequate answers for the challenges of this day. Only by what is expressed through the pure white sheet of card can we affect our generation for Jesus Christ as we ought. That sheet was not placed in front of me by hands reaching over my shoulders. Jesus has promised to build His Church. It seems heretical to act as though the more we do the more the Church is being built. Some folk wear themselves out, bring tragic tension to their family life, and even literally work themselves to death endeavouring to build the Church of God. God does more the more we trust, rather than the more we do. Jesus is building His Church. Hallelujah! I visited folk in County Wexford who at times come up to Dublin to attend various gatherings of saints. They had invited friends for the evening who came from as far as twelve and even forty or more miles away. The brother shared that God had shown him a vision of these friends as lighthouses in lonely places. "Some of you want to be coming together regularly and frequently for meetings," he said, "but God has placed the lighthouses where they are, to shine for Him there." His remarks remind me of the pinpoints of light in the dream God gave me. To bring all the pinpoints of light together may result in a big enough light to draw people to it. But that is not their purpose. A lighthouse doesn't shine to attract ships to itself, but rather to point the way forward to the safe ending of their journey. Elijah thought that he stood alone, and that his cause was hopeless, even though he had seen God do marvellous things and had been used in a significant way by God to uphold His honour. "I am the only one left," he cried out to the Lord, "and now they are trying to kill me too" It is a high privilege to have precious, lovely friends in Ireland, whose hearts are so purely for God's glory, who enjoy a delightful intimacy of love with their Saviour, and who walk in sweet consistency in the Holy Spirit. But in this dream, there was strong encouragement from the Lord for me! He has more followers by far that we know, whose knees "have not bowed down to Baal." How easy it is to become slaves of the visible. But God is always doing ever so much more than we can see or know. We dare not measure what God is doing by what we see Him doing. Rather, let our measuring be in the realms of revelation and faith. By God's grace let us never limit God by what we see or know about Him and about His work. He is moving on in triumph. He is building His Church. The outcome is beyond question! "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, / as the waters cover the sea" The nations of this earth do "become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign for ever and ever. For to us a child is born, / to us a son is given, / and the government will be on His shoulders. / And he will be called / Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. / Of the increase of His government and peace / there will be no end. At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, / in heaven and on earth and under the earth, / and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, / to the glory of God the Father. The government of Ireland will one day be on His shoulders! Lord, hasten the day! He will be crowned King of All Ireland. He is already anointed as that! He has a rare and priceless jewel there. It is the people of His heart, the people of His throne. Lord Jesus, you are building your Church! May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. For yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen!

THE FIRE OF GOD

Chapter 2

It was a beautiful picture! The Lord Jesus was standing in the centre of a gathering of His people. In the Spirit I could see Him clearly. They seemed to be aware of His Presence but were not able to see Him. Wholehearted love for Him was being corporately expressed in various precious ways. A deep thrill gripped my inner being as I gazed with wonder at His delight in their worship. What joy and love shone forth from His countenance in response! I was gripped by a recognition of the depth of His desire to be the focus of the fully expressed love of His dear ones, and of His appreciation of their pure love for Him. What an amazing gown Jesus wore, as I looked upon Him in my vision. He was robed with fire! Oblivious to those around me, I stood in silent awe in the majestic presence of One who simultaneously manifests both gracious humility and regal grandeur. I saw how He is touched by the love flowing from their hearts. Now I saw the response from His heart! His presence among them and delight in them combined to bring supernatural blessing. How can one describe such a thing? I saw the Lord, the King of Glory! His robe of fire seemed to swirl about Him like a living thing. Tongues of fire swung out until they touched those that were gathered about Him. They settled upon the head of some people. Fingers of fire seemed to touch others in heart and hand, or ear and tongue or face and feet. Some seemed enveloped in the fire of God! "Lord," my heart whispered, "I need your fire so very much. In all of my life I need the touch of your fingers of flame. Every day of my life let me know this sacred sphere of fire!" To live so near to Him! To be totally sensitive to His desires! To express my love with my whole heart in every step of life. To know His life-touch so that He might find joy in me, be glorified through me, and be confident in my constant availability to Him! This is the deepest yearning of my heart. Little wonder what tears flowed gently as I bowed before Him! Thank God He has not spared me from tears of wonder, sensitivity, love, and full response to the moving and manifestations of His Holy Spirit! I received this vision at a gathering of a few folk early one morning in Dublin. We were waiting on the Lord for direction and blessing in regard to a gathering of saints over the coming Easter season. We had become wearied by words. We knew that God is not verbose as preachers are, and we knew that "The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." If it were in words, most of us would be much further ahead, and many Christian leaders would be in the vanguard of a glorious procession rather than in danger of missing it altogether! Our cry was that our living, loving Lord would show Himself in the midst of His people with awesome manifestation of His grace and power. The vision seemed too sacred for me to share that morning as we sought the Lord together. A fresh glimpse of He who is robed with fire came to me in the first meeting that Easter, and I spoke of it to the gathered throng. A highly esteemed brother shared with me, "Just before you spoke about the fire of God I saw tongues of fire in every window of this building." How sorry I feel for those who have clear vision of earthly things and yet neither see nor expect to see reality in the realm of the Spirit. Please don't dare dismiss as "Just a visionary, a dreamer" anyone who shares the spiritual dimension of his walk with Christ. A Dream of the Church's Future In the church of my dreams there will be repeated, awesome, breathtaking manifestations of God in, upon, and among His people! I know it is so. I have heard from heaven! These manifestations will be linked with the norm for a naturalness

of the people of God walking in revelation. Breath-taking, yes, but breath-giving, too! What a flow of the life and the power of God this will bring to the whole spectrum of life. It will come in such a manner that He alone will be glorified. Hallelujah! The very thought and prospect stirs my heart again and again. Revelation in the sense I use it simply means God revealing, showing, displaying, uncovering, unveiling, manifesting and making Himself known, clear, visible, real and very personal. Let me share the biblical certainty of walking in revelation as God's purposes for His people today. Please be willing to allow the Lord Jesus Christ to be enthroned in your life so that you are not kept in the slavery of humanistic mediocrity by King Reason, the accursed yet popular authority in too much of church life today, including that considered to be involved in renewal and restoration. Here are some Old Testament statements concerning God showing himself to men: GENESIS 28:16,17 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven" EXODUS 33:14,18: The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ISAIAH 40:5: The glory of the LORD will be revealed, / and all mankind together will see it. EZEKIEL 39:21-22 I will display My glory among the nations. HABAKKUK 3:2-4: LORD, I have heard of your fame, I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. / Renew them in our day, / in our time make them known; / in wrath remember mercy. / God came from Teman, / and the Holy One from Mount Paran. / His glory covered the heavens / and His praise covered the earth / His splendour was like the sunrise; / rays flashed from His hand; / where His power was hidden. In the New Testament we frequently see the norm of supernatural revelation. Here are some examples: ACTS 7:55,56: But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" ACTS 26:19: So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1, 7:1: I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh. 1 JOHN 1:3: We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard - WUEST: That which we have seen with discernment and at present is in our mind's eye, and that which we have heard and at present is ringing in our ears, we are reporting also to you... 8 2 PETER 1:16-18: We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His Majesty. For He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came out of heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain. Now consider Scriptures that declare the purpose and provision of God in order that believers today may walk in revelation. Let this be the Word of God to you! JOHN 14:21: Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to him. ACTS 2:17,19: "In the last days," God says, / I will pour out My Spirit on all people. / Your sons and daughters will prophesy, / your young men will see visions, / your old men will dream dreams. / I will show wonders in the heaven above, / and signs on the earth below" 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7: Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 2 CORINTHIANS 3:7: Now, if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved on letters of stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the

ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? Surely our response to these things must be in the words of Paul, "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" The Sphere of Fire Kenneth Wuest translated a familiar verse in a striking way: "...He Himself will baptize you in the sphere of and by means of the Holy Spirit and fire." Likewise, he quoted Paul as urging us to be "Fervent in the sphere of the Spirit and reminding young Timothy to "Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." What a challenge! To be immersed in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, and also in the sphere of fire. Would be to God every Christian life were lived out in these dimensions of the provision of God's grace for the people of God today, no less than in any other age! There is a term that has recently come alive to me. It is this: "Spiritual awareness." We are all very aware of natural things about us, such as weather conditions, family joys or stresses, work challenges and problems, our financial condition and political situations, not only in our own nation but in various "hot spots" in the world at large. But are we so involved and engrossed in natural (even though important, and possibly even essential) earthly things that we are oblivious to spiritual conditions, climate, needs and challenges? In the midst of natural encounters and events do we "keep a foot in both worlds" in the sense of being alert to the desires of our Lord, the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and the emphasis and importance or otherwise that He places on the material, natural things with which we are engaged? There is a great need indeed for us to remain immersed in the sphere of the Holy Spirit and in the sphere of fire. "Fire" is not intended to give the thought of frenetic activity. It should mean 9 "love flame towards God" first of all, and also the supernatural activity of the abundant life of God within us. Then, it expresses our commitment to a wholehearted response to the specific directions given to us by the Holy Spirit. It also indicates a "responding to God" willingness to allow all that is contrary to Father's highest purposes for our lives to be incinerated into nothingness, and thus totally removed from our lives. For such a life, revelations of His glory are very important. We need to be echoing Moses: "Let me see your glory" - laying hold of the word in Isaiah "The glory of the Lord will be revealed" - and rejoicing in the promise of the Lord Jesus "I will love him and show Myself to Him." "Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; / His greatness no one can fathom. / One generation will commend your works to another; / they will tell of your mighty acts. / They will speak of the glorious splendour of Your Majesty, / and I will meditate on your wonderful works. / They will tell of the power of your awesome works, / and I will proclaim your great deeds." So, may it be declared again in this day, "Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

The Whole Christ in The Whole Church

Chapter 3

It was Good Friday in Dublin. Leaders had come to spend most of the day to wait on God and to hear God together, and to allow Him to prepare us so that He could overflow these earthen vessels and display His splendour in the public meetings to follow. In my own heart, and doubtless in others, there was a deep yearning that man might be hidden and the Lord Jesus obviously and wonderfully exalted. We wanted nothing of human manipulation, crippling tradition or empty words. When will God's people come to where we are more aware of God, His nearness, His love and His desires, than we are of ourselves, others or anything of earth? God hasten the day! It is in His heart for us. At times we have joked about the number of meetings leaders have, in addition to gatherings with nonleaders. Are they the Lord's 'backward' class - the group that need extra tuition to help them keep up with the rest of the Body? Are they like the 'military awkward' squad that need extra 'square bashing' to bring them up to an acceptable standard of precision? Are they undergoing the kind of training that businesses provide for management trainees? I fear that it is worse than any of that! Gatherings of leaders could be very wonderful if the purpose was for us to humble ourselves before God, and learn of Him until, like Paul, we could exhort the people of God, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Isn't it more likely, however, that leaders' gatherings foster an elitism, support a kind of authority that is far from the nature of Jesus with His meek servant heart, and promote the methodologies of humanistic activism and externalism? In further chapters we shall share more fully concerning the nature of leadership, the nature of authority and the nature of the Church itself, in the Church of my dreams. At some stage of that Good Friday a verse began to burn within me. It was as though the Holy Spirit was opening that Scripture and opening my heart and then blending the two together. It was as though, rather than Paul, the instrument through whom the statement came, it was the Lord Jesus who gazed at me with a tearful, searching, longing expression, saying, "I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." It overflowed in prophetic declaration. It was a word from the Lord for all who were there. How good God is in the way He speaks - so simply, clearly and directly! "I am not content," says the Lord, "Simply that the moral Christ be formed in you. I want the whole Christ to come to full expression in your lives." "It is in My heart for you that the emotional Christ be an integral part of your lives. He was anointed with the oil of joy and yet He wept over Jerusalem; He was moved with empathetic compassion at the need of individuals and the needs of the multitudes." "I want the redemptive Christ to be formed in you. He went out to find the lost sheep; He shared the good news of His Father's kingdom; and He laid down His life to make a way for the lost of the earth to be redeemed." "I am in the pains of childbirth until the triumphant Christ is formed in you," says the Lord. "I am not content with your experience of seasons of overcoming and times of great victory. I yearn for you that you may continually know my grace in such measure that you walk in constant triumph, being more than conquerors because of My love for you." This is the heart, the thrust, of what I was hearing, rather than the exact words used to express what was touching my own heart very deeply. One thought took hold of me after that experience of hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit: To be like Jesus, I must be a friend of sinners! "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered when tax collectors and sinners were all gathering 11 around to hear Him. Would to God that something could happen in us so

that people would gather around to hear Him through us! That is very different from inviting sinners to "Gospel Meetings" or "Crusades" (Non-biblical activities?) The Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard the question He said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Nowadays believers love to share meals with one another, as perhaps the people of God always have. The fellowship is great. We have so much in common because of Jesus. Is there a problem? Do multiplied meetings, plus our sharing time and meals with one another, leave us with neither time, energy or desire to eat with sinners and be their friends? Aren't we signalling to them that if they want to enjoy our friendship they must join our club? We went walking one day in Cape Town. Some blocks from the home we were using we bought a newspaper from a 'coloured' man at a street corner. He looked surly, with anger and hate plainly showing on his face. As we walked away my wife Mary said, "That man is in need of friendship." So, we walked that way often, purchasing a newspaper and seeking to be friendly. Gradually we saw a change until he smiled when we approached, ran over to bring us a paper, and let us know if a later edition was about to arrive. We talked of various things to Michael, just wanting him to sense care, acceptance and love. After several months we moved on to Johannesburg. The day before we left Cape Town we went to say goodbye to Michael, offering him a copy of our book, 'God in My Dreams' and a small financial gift as well. In the book we had written, "To Michael. We love you. God bless you!" "God made all of us" Michael said, no doubt making a valid statement about racial equality. "Yes, He did" we replied, "And He wants to live in each of us, changing our lives and being our Friend." Just a few simple statements, in the timing of God, to a man to whom we had shown simple friendliness. Michael returned to sell papers, and we couldn't see what he was doing by the curb. We had come by car that day because of time pressure. On a busy street we drove two blocks and then swung back the way we had come. Now we could see what Michael was doing at the curb side. He was kneeling in prayer. Glory to Jesus! Bless Him for challenging us to be a friend of sinners. Many a time I have prayed, "Father, couldn't there be one generation in all of history when the great majority did not live without you, and then go to a Christ less grave? Couldn't it be this generation?" But at the same time there has been the cry, "But, Father, there has to be a better way than what has been seen in men's methods of evangelism in recent generations!" A Prodigal Church? When the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered because Jesus was associating with such despicable people and even eating with them, He told the story of the prodigal son. Everyone acknowledges that the father of the prodigal is an apt portrayal of God, our Father. So, what was so wrong with the younger son saying, "Give me my share of the estate?" Don't we Christians keep asking God for all that we can have of His life, power, blessing, signs and wonders? Isn't it true that every popular doctrine in recent times, at least in the western world, has pandered to Christian selfishness? "More for me, for us, for our church," has surely been at the heart of much of our "seeking God." 12 Could we be a prodigal church? Jesus' story gives a magnificent picture of Father's love for lost people. The father saw his son returning while he was still a long way off. Doubtless, it would not have mattered what time of the day it was; his father would have seen him coming. The father commanded his servants, "Be bringing the calf, the one which we have been fattening for such an occasion of rejoicing as this." Perhaps it would not have mattered which season of the year it was either. There would have been a fattened calf ready! Isn't this a tremendous picture of Father God's longing for sinners to come

home to Him? It has been well noted that when the father ran to welcome his son it is the only Bible picture of God in a hurry! He hastens to welcome sinners! The older brother bothers me! He did not know nor care that his brother had returned. This older brother had not wandered to a far country, but the far country had taken possession of his heart! His concern, like his brothers had been, and still was, for his share of his father's estate. Surely, he missed his brother? Surely, he had threatened a servant with dire consequences if he didn't inform him immediately when his brother returned? Surely, he would join the celebration with eager alacrity when his brother came home? Why, oh why not? Several years ago, we went to visit folk on a ranch near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The wife in the home had come to know Jesus as living Lord some time previously, but the husband had not yet found salvation in Christ. We were stopping overnight, and that evening folk gathered to worship the Lord, and for us to share with them. We set ourselves to be friendly to that unbelieving husband. We were aware that he could feel awkward and threatened by our presence, and we wanted to set him free from that. It's fun to be friendly! We have only recently heard that sometime after our visit the husband came to Christ. We are not claiming to have had any part whatever in his finding the Lord, but at least God gave us grace not to be a hindrance! Well-meaning Christians can cause embarrassment and be such a hindrance to non-believers by their religiosity and their attempts to pressure people into commitment to the Lord. Years ago, I complained to the Lord. "People are saying that I am 'stuck-up' and proud. Lord, you know that I struggle with shyness and inferiority, so why should they say these things?" "Set yourself to be an approachable person," was the releasing word of the Lord to me. If a neighbour, a work associate or some relative or acquaintance needs help, will they think of us, or simply dismiss us as being cranks and fanatics who are too busy with our church programmes to have time to help them? "This fellow is giving sinners access to himself and his companionship and is eating with them," it was said of Jesus. Do we aspire to being like Him? Let us also be friends of sinners! People with pressures, needs, problems, fear and loneliness rub shoulders with us almost continually. Have you thought of how much a smile or a word of thoughtfulness can mean? We should be deeply challenged to be a friendly, smiling, helpful people not only so that we can be like Jesus, but so that sinners may gain an understanding of what He is like. Jesus, Friend of Sinners JESUS welcomed sinners. They came to Him. He spoke differently, and they enjoyed listening to Him. He accepted their offered hospitality. How rewarding that was! He even took the initiative and invited himself to their homes. "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today," is an example of that! 13 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with Him and His disciples. Jesus preferred to meet people either in homes, or in the great outdoors. Could that possibly be true? JESUS accepted sinners. He didn't harangue, condemn, pressure or belittle them. He spoke their kind of language and shared illustrations relevant to their life style. If he were here now I am very confident that He would never use the language of yesterday. King James English, which has become the language of the religiosity of an irrelevant church. He understood them and made a way for them to identify with Him in a brotherly way that was both comfortable and challenging at the same time. JESUS encouraged sinners. They carry heavy loads. He shared reality with them, speaking of inner needs and new life. He breathed hope, truth and love. He gave them understanding of His Father's heart, and of His Father's wonderful purpose for them. JESUS served sinners. He gave them of His time. He gave them himself. He gave them what they needed from what He was, and what He is. JESUS was a friend of sinners, but not a sinner. He did not hide His true identity. He honoured His Father.

He sought nothing from them for Himself. He was different from others about Him, especially those who were religious. He was caring and compassionate, and let it show! He was uncompromisingly honest, but neither judgemental nor rejecting of sinners. He welcomed sinners and enjoyed their company, but He could not tolerate religious hypocrites! He was a real man and challenged people to find reality in Him. A couple of years ago I was in a church service, invited there as a guest speaker. In the silence of my heart I cried heavenward, "Lord, I don't feel comfortable here!" I hope that my interpretation of His reply is not considered too earthy. This is what I believe His answer was: "No sweat, John, I don't feel comfortable here either!" Today the Lord Jesus Christ still finds no pleasure in hypocrisy and religiosity. Jesus declared that to love our neighbour as ourselves is a commandment high in priority, second only to loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind. Our neighbour is a sinner in need. Every sinner needs a friend who will love him and share the reality of Jesus' life with him. Jesus was a friend of sinners. I want Christ to be formed in me! Jesus laid down His life for sinners. Clothed in us He seeks not only to express to them the provision made through His death, but also to show clearly and fully the undying love He has for them. This is a part of the church of my dreams: A people who have found such reality in Jesus that friendship with sinners has become the norm of Christian living and has become a highway of salvation for multitudes. I have received a lovely promise from the Lord concerning the church of my dreams. Many precious blessings lie ahead for all who will consistently walk in the reality of true godliness, and in sweet, eager, yielding openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is the promise: "Natural weakness in sharing Jesus, linked with friendliness and true naturalness, will have supernatural consequences. What is sown in weakness will bring a glorious harvest as we depend on God's grace each step of our life." This promise came with a picture in my spirit of the water that flowed from the Temple in Ezekiel 47. It commenced its journey as water less than ankle-deep and ended up deep enough "to swim in - a river that no one could cross." "I am the LORD; / in its time I will do this swiftly." My heart responds, "Amen! Let it be so, Lord Jesus." 14

Breaking the Bottleneck

Chapter 4

It was an amazing dream. It could be one of the most significant revelations that God the Spirit has entrusted to me to share with His people! I saw what appeared to be an hourglass of gigantic proportions. In fact, the top of it seemed to reach into the heavens, so that I could not see the upper rim at all. The lower portion of the hourglass was smaller than the upper part, so that if what was in the top part were to pour into the lower part it would not be able to contain it all. The lower portion of the hourglass was so immense that it covered great nations, including South Africa, where I was at the time. The lands inside that lower part seemed to be in a condition of drought and famine, with need and hunger everywhere, and with very little nourishment to be found anywhere. The lands cried out for rain, and the peoples were in desperate need of hope, health and nourishment. Shadow and gloom shrouded the countryside. Here and there I perceived pockets of abundance, but they were pitifully small and inadequate for the countries encircled by the hourglass. How can I describe what was in the upper portion of the hourglass? It appeared to be overflowing with heaven's refreshments — life, light, love, fulfilment, rest and joy. The presence, blessing, and superabundant provision of God himself seemed to permeate all that I envisaged in that wonderful and glorious upper part of the hourglass. In addition, perhaps strangely, I saw sweet believers also mingled in with the ingredients of heaven. But they were not, or at least not all, believers who were already in heaven. In my dream I recognized some dear brothers and sisters in God who are still very much alive and well here on the earth. Although I did not recognize many, it was sufficient for me to understand that in the hourglass were the kind of Christians that others aspire to be — those who here and now have entered a spiritual land that flows with milk and honey, and where they "find refuge in the shadow of [His] wings. / They feast on the abundance of [His] house, / [and] drink from [His] river of delights." (1) It is amazing, isn't it? God has made such abundant and astounding provision for the multitudes of earth! Well may He ask, "What more could have been done for My vineyard / than I have done for it?" (2) Through the atoning death of Jesus, through His triumphant resurrection and ascension, through His continual intercession for us, through the outpoured Holy Spirit, and through the continuing expressions of His grace towards us, the eternal, almighty, all-wise and all powerful God has done all that is possible for Him to do so that mere mortal man may continually experience a very delightful foretaste of heaven's wonder here and now, and its eternal fullness later. The Great Paradox Yes, all of that, God, in His stupendous, fathomless love has purposed and provided for frail, simple, sinful, fallen mankind! It exists, it is available freely, and God wants it to be fully availed of now! Then what is the hindrance? Why do multitudes live in the spiritually arid conditions depicted in my dream? Where is the blockage? What is the bottleneck? How is it that even the vast majority of those who have come to know life in Jesus experience such a pitifully small measure of what has been clearly and unequivocally promised for them? Why the bottleneck? Has it truly been declared that we are intended to be super conquerors through him who loved us? (3) Have inexpressible and glorious joy, (4) and peace like a river (5) as well, really been pledged to us? Are we, in very fact, intended to live a life in the midst of pressures and 15 problems where being seated with Jesus in the heavenly realms (6) is glorious reality and not simply frustrating and disillusionary theory? Why the bottleneck? Hasn't God in His grace promised forgiveness, cleansing and a totally new life for even the

vilest wretch who turns in repentance and faith to our Lord Jesus Christ? Cannot even such a person be assured of hope that gives! We can know as much of God's blessing, fullness and enabling grace as the sweetest, noblest saint ever has, and thus even we can declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. (8) In this day of challenge and crisis, we must be this kind of people. We must find a way to affect our generation in such a manner that God is fully satisfied, wonderfully pleased, yes, and even glorified throughout the whole earth in this present day. Simple, honest, wholehearted believers can be used by the Holy Spirit to change the course of nations Let us break the bottleneck! Oh, yes, I do understand that it will take the grace and power of God. But they are available! So, let us break the bottleneck! In the church of my dreams, the day comes! A people of God are equipped, Christ-like and Spirit-enveloped so that even in the desert a way is prepared for the Lord. In the wilderness a straight highway is made for our God. Valleys are raised up and mountains and hills are made low. Rough places are made level and the rugged places become a plain. The glory of the Lord is revealed, and all mankind sees it together. For the mouth of the Lord has declared it. (9) Glory to God! Lift up your heads, for the day is approaching, the great and awesome day of our God. He will have a glorious Church without malfunction, imperfection or even sign of aging. We will be the people of God for this day of the Lord. Hallelujah! Are we willing to pay whatever price is required so that the bottleneck is broken? Surely there are many who are! Are you? In this book we look at areas of church life, as well as personal life, that need radical adjustment so that heaven's finest fullness may overflow earth's deepest needs. As we look, we pray, "Build your Church, Lord Jesus." 5

Bottleneck of Human Tradition

Chapter 5

We are well aware of the challenge that Jesus presented to the traditions of His day. When some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders?" He was quick to reply, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (1) He proceeded to tell them, "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites." (2) The traditions of the elders then were manmade rules of many kinds, including very restrictive and judgmental interpretation, or more likely misinterpretation, of their Scriptures. It was because of the burdens of religious tradition that Jesus invited us, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (3) [emphasis added]. 16 "My yoke is mild and pleasant, and my load is light in weight." (4) How the folk then burdened by the rules and rituals of the day rejoiced to hear Jesus say that! Little wonder that they thronged to hear Him! He was showing them a more excellent way. "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat," Jesus commented. "So, you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." (5) Look at the report about the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15. In verse 5 some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses." After consultation with the apostles and elders, Peter got up and addressed them. In verses 10 and 11 he asked, "Why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?" With boldness he proceeded, "No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." For these new believers there were only three requirements necessary, the apostles, elders and gathered throng agreed. Importantly, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit as well as to them: (6) Firstly they were to do nothing to compromise the absolute and sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. Thus, they should not eat meat offered to idols. Then, they were to live with a moral integrity befitting new life in Christ. Thus, they were to abstain from sexual immorality. They were also enjoined not to partake of blood or of meat from strangled animals. This may mean that they were to be wise concerning the sensitivities of other believers — Jewish ones in this particular case. Anything beyond that were simply the traditions of men, and a burden beyond bearing. There was great freedom for them as they walked with the Lord Jesus. **Burdens Too Heavy to Bear** The heavy burdens of tradition placed on reluctantly compliant shoulders by the Jewish leaders were: **LEGALISM**: Manmade and man-policed laws and duties were a continuing reminder of the authority that leaders had taken upon themselves and used to maintain their position by keeping their flock in subjection to them. **EXTERNALISM**: The leaders' example of hypocrisy, pomp and show called for like emptiness of form, empty words, meaningless noise and never-ending activity from their followers. **NATURAL PERSPECTIVES**: Value was placed on commitment to human initiative and achievement by the leaders, linked with what can only be described as worldly evaluation and gain. This was in spite of the fact that they claimed to be very godly and unworldly. Did traditions end when the Church began? We know they did not!

When we see that other churches and movements around us hold to the traditions of men, what blindness grips us if we are not willing to allow the Holy Spirit to challenge us about areas in which we also are bound by the "traditions of the elders" — even our good elders! The three areas detailed above are still the places where we too can very, very easily become burdened and bound, even in the redeemed, renewed, and restored Church of Jesus Christ. I am persuaded that we are more bound by tradition now than the Jewish system was when Jesus came to earth! 17 At the heart of today's yoke of tradition in the Church is active humanism, including restoration humanism. What a crippling curse this is! It detracts woefully from God being glorified in the Church and in Christ Jesus (7) in our day. HUMANISM can be seen in widely held views concerning the nature of leadership. Even godly men who have come into new dimensions of restoration, or kingdom life, in the Spirit are sadly, and perhaps often willingly, blind about it. It is a burden too heavy to bear! HUMANISM is also rampant among us with the weight of obligations and duties that are placed upon submissive people by the leaders of today's church. They are a burden too heavy to bear! HUMANISM and its bondages show up clearly in the multiplied meetings that believers are made to feel very obliged to attend, and to feel falsely guilty if they do not, notwithstanding that there is no valid biblical requirement involved. Linked with these unwritten traditional laws concerning meeting are the similarly binding and restrictive demands for external conformity. There are a multitude of dos and don'ts that affect dress, behaviour, home life, meeting style, and so forth and have nothing at all to do with godly living or with walking in the Spirit. Men can readily legislate external conformity, but rules cannot change the heart. These things too, are a burden too heavy to bear! More than just being unbearably heavy burdens, these requirements of men in their bondage to tradition become a part of the bottleneck that hinders the overflowing life of heaven from reaching earth's spiritually needy millions. Please bear in mind that because of the influence of substandard churchdom into which we have been birthed, you too are almost certainly burdened with a yoke that is neither mild and pleasant, and unnecessarily laden with a load that is not light in weight. If you are burdened and weighted like that, one thing is clear beyond possibility of contradiction: such loads do not come from Jesus. You have His word on that! Let me share with you some of the effects of tradition in the Church today: BECAUSE OF TRADITION God becomes obscure, vague and distant. It becomes virtually impossible to keep Him in clear focus and to keep our eyes fixed on Him. BECAUSE OF TRADITION spiritual ardour is dampened. Spiritual love-fervour for the Lord is "Being tempted repeatedly to give way to enthusiasm for man-created programmes and thus tempted to be substituted for by fleshly zeal. BECAUSE OF TRADITION the freshness of a sweet and precious love relationship with Jesus becomes strained and drained again and again. Tradition engenders and fosters staleness. BECAUSE OF TRADITION clear and consistent hearing of the Holy Spirit is lost so that confusion and error are frequently evident among us. How can we understand what the Holy Spirit is saying when leaders are promoting their human ways, ideas and programmes as the "will of God? BECAUSE OF TRADITION light-spiritedness is lost. We ought to be like the gazelle or young deer upon the mountains. Tradition tends to make plodding farm horses out of us! There is amazing "Buoyancy of spirit for those who will set themselves to obey God and reject the traditions of men regardless of cost. BECAUSE OF TRADITION faith becomes hard _work, something that is struggled (even agonized) over, rather than a continuing confidence in the One who is totally faithful and trustworthy. BECAUSE OF TRADITION faithfulness to leadership and human church systems become blasphemously equated to faith in God. May God himself

have mercy on us and set us free from blindness and the fear of man, which is a snare and a prison that keeps us locked into the traditions of men. 18 In the church of my dreams, man-made traditions, systems, structures and emphases become merely wasted debris on the sands of time. The people of God are free at last. Glory to His name! Yes, glory to Him forever and ever! In the church of my dreams, because the traditions of men are no more, the bottleneck is broken and heaven cascades down upon earth. In another context, but relevant to what we have stated above, God himself challenges us: "Test Me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." He continues, "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," (8) says the LORD Almighty. Good news! In my dream the bottleneck is broken, heaven's floodgates open wide, and God becomes to us more than we ever dreamed of or dared to hope for. Bless Him forever. 19

Be Different!

Chapter 6

One sister asked me a question that provoked a train of thought going far beyond the immediate area of discussion. The question was amusingly simple: "What is the book of Revelation about?" "Let me give you a glimpse of things I see there," I replied, and forthwith proceeded thus: The book shows that in every generation there are three areas through which Christians can be defeated and made ineffective. And yet there is triumph through Jesus Christ in all these areas, in every age, for all the people of God. The areas are, firstly, the realm of personal impurity. We are called to holy living, and grace and strength is provided for us to live pure and godly lives. Then there is the temptation to unjust commerce, 3' and all that is pictured in weighted scales unfair trading, and underhandedness in buying and selling. Thirdly, there is the snare of corrupt power and the drive to dominate and control, which is found not only in men like Hitler and Stalin, or even only in the secular world. In the Church, too, the temptation to misuse position and to exercise false, dominating and manipulating authority is appallingly evident. Following that brief and very limited answer I found myself thinking for days about the letters to the seven representative churches in the Roman province of Asia, as found in Revelation 2 and 3. When the Lord of the Church had something against one of those geographically established churches it was because they had been influenced by, and in some measure had become like, their environment. "Is that a key to the bottleneck that hinders heaven's blessings from flooding the earth? South Africa Being in South Africa at the time, my first thought was of that land. What are its national characteristics? Let me express my personal view of a few of them. TRIBALISM is a fact of life there. There are various African tribes, such as Zulu, 'Tswana, Xhosa and Sotho. Besides that, the Afrikaners also have distinct tribal characteristics. We are surely well aware that one does not need to come to Africa to discover tribalism! Tribalism is a curse in the Church of Jesus Christ! Some claim to be of Paul, and some of Apollos, so to speak. Some boast of belonging to one denomination, and some to another. Today many boast of belonging to no denomination at all, and simply_ state that they 'relate' to this man, or that one. None will admit it, but the message, most give through attitude, emphasis and action is "Our 'club' is best!" It is all tribalism, and at times the latter kind has more fault and failure than the denominations they look down upon. Both are less than ideal! It is very blessed to be free from the bondage of systematized religion. To be fair, however, we must acknowledge that some of the "come-outers" have come into more_ bondage and have come under more corrupt power than they ever experienced Before. 20 GREED and ARROGANCE can also be found in that lovely land. Gold has brought wealth, and wealth has brought arrogance and selfishness. "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked," Jesus told the church in Laodicea. (1) He counselled them to buy gold refined in the fire, so they could truly be rich. In today's Church many feel blessed with abundant wealth because of their large following, or their great buildings, or because of their schemes and programmes for church growth, or their "We are ahead of the rest" doctrines and experiences, or because of the outstanding charismatic personalities that lead them. They do not realize that they may be poor and blind and naked. That could be God's perspective on them! There is a different kind of wealth to be obtained in the realm of the Spirit. It is gold tried in the fire of

testing, purifying and persecution. PREJUDICE and VULNERABILITY go hand in hand in South Africa. Prejudicial attitudes of superiority lead to a sense of being very vulnerable in case a supposedly deserved place of superiority is lost. In the church of my dreams a day comes when Christians see each other as brothers and sisters with no dividing sectarian labels and with neither attitudes of superiority nor a laager mentality of "losing people" or being overwhelmed by a "rival" church in the neighbourhood. Attitudes of superiority and vulnerability grieve the Holy Spirit deeply and thus perpetuate that awful bottleneck. It is worth stating, even though just in passing, that there is a Marxist, anti-Christian lie being spread throughout the world today. It falsely teaches that prejudice and racialism are found only or mainly among people with white skins. That is not true! Such things are found most where there has been least influence from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or where He is most rejected; prejudice and racialism are not limited to any colour, caste or creed. Let me hasten to assure you that I have no intention whatever of sitting in judgment on South Africa. Many other nations deserve judgment more than this nation, where the government does at least attempt to recognize and honour God in its functions. I am deeply blessed at precious things that God is doing in this land. Personally, spending several months there, I can see good steps are being taken towards bringing justice and equality, and God is touching His Church in a new way. What happens in South Africa in these next several years will be an expression of God's assessment of His Church, not primarily a result of force, intrigue, suppression, subversion or international pressure. New Zealand These are days of rapid change in some aspects of New Zealand life. Some changes are for the better, and some are not. Attitudes to change on the national scene can be a pointer to our reluctance for change on the church scene. Isn't it strange how in the Church worldwide over many years now there has been an eagerness to change that which should remain constant, and a reluctance to accept change where it is rightly required? Here are some areas of danger for New Zealand Christians. Believers in other lands will identify with some of our foibles: RELIANCE ON THE WELFARE STATE has brought distress in the last few years as steps have been taken by government to remove such reliance. Surely there is a danger, in a socialistic society, of lazy people "bludging" on the provision of state aid. Do Christians tend to rely on the church and its leaders, and on their own abilities rather than having confidence in God (alone?) and revelling in His matchless grace? Does teaching about 21 covering, counselling, discipleship and meeting-centred living spring from an emphasis on such dependence? DEMANDS FOR THE SECURITY OF EQUALITY, which always levels out at mediocrity, have been an integral part of trade unionism. Pay bargaining and promotion on the basis of seniority rather than skill, ability and diligence are an aspect of this. Is the individual Christian too ready to stay at about the same level as other Christians, and thus content with the dreadful mediocrity which is far from scarce among us? THE INSECURITY OF SMALLNESS (provincialism) that marks too many of us results in defensiveness and undue pride — boasting about things that are greater in our imagination than they ought to be (for example, some new scientific discovery, or the prowess of the All Blacks) — and criticism of others. We can be tempted to blow out somebody else's candle so that ours shines more brightly. Is this the background of such things as a competitive spirit and a desire among Christians to get the credit for their accomplishments? God is robbed of His rightful glory because of attitudes like that. Caution is advised! A "SHE'LL BE RIGHT" MENTALITY is common in New Zealand. I believe that there is stupendous blindness, even among renewed believers, to the amazing purpose of God for this generation. We are too content to shrug our shoulders and to stay as we are, or else we are

content to let God be God and run His kingdom how He wills without any sense of awe at His choosing to rely on our cooperation. Perhaps our CASUAL KIWI APPROACH to life makes it too easy for the church to exist at a lesser level of life than it ought, and also causes it to lower its moral standards, allowing shades of grey to become acceptable. Surely there is a great need for rugged holiness among us, along with big-hearted forgiveness and restorative love. Is there now coming to New Zealand a MILITANT EXPRESSION OF REBELLION that in effect declares: "We will get what we want, even if we have to ride roughshod over other people to get it"? This expression of superiority and conceited feeling that we alone are right is most disturbing. I wonder if the world learned it from the church. They well may have! All of the national characteristics of our home nations indicate areas of danger for followers of Christ. Are we becoming like the society around us? Do its moral standards, the drive for success, wealth, recognition or personal achievement taint us? Are we unable to be "a city on a hill" (2) to our generation, setting an example of a higher, purer and much more meaningful and permanently satisfying life style because we are being influenced by the secular world about us? We should be influencing it, not it us! At the heart of the characteristics of secular society is a demand to control — not only one's own life and destiny, but also to control as much attention, wealth and as many people as is humanly possible. A desire to control is always carnal. A willingness to be constantly controlled by the Holy Spirit, (3) living self-crucified lives, and gladly and unreservedly allowing Jesus to be Head of the Church in very truth is at the core of true godliness. Jesus broke a bottleneck that allowed salvation to be made available to all mankind by laying down His life for the lost of earth. Laying down our lives in total yieldedness to Him and choosing to be love slaves claiming no rights for ourselves, is a major key to breaking the bottleneck that delays the outflow of God's glorious life and love to multitudes today. True old fashioned self-crucified living is still disappointingly "scarce on the ground." Only Jesus Christ can control an individual, a group, or a nation with peace, equity, love and lasting benefit to all. It is a change of heart, and a change of hearts, much more than a change of government or of economic conditions or of political emphasis that is needed in South Africa, and in New Zealand, and in Britain, the United States of America, and every other nation on earth. 22 There is a great challenge that comes to us today. It is a call to be willing to be different, to stand alone, to ignore criticism, misunderstanding and prejudice, to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus and to venture into the unknown of God's highest purposes for this generation. "You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person does. Your real life is in heaven with Christ and God. And when Christ who is our real life comes back again, you will shine with him and share in all his glories." (4) There is guaranteed glory ahead for us all if we dare to be different today! Walk alone with Jesus, then, if that is necessary. Set your heart on heaven and at the same time live in high expectation of earth being filled with God's glory, for that is more sure than tomorrow's sunrise. It is the plan of God! Praise Him for His certain, ultimate and eternal triumph. He will reign forever and ever. Glory to Jesus, King of all the earth!

Is There a Faith Key for Bottleneck-Breaking?

Chapter 7

What a strange question Jesus asked: "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (1) There will be plenty of "faith teaching" and "faith teachers," of that we can surely be confident. But faith teaching isn't faith! There is a noticeable difference among believers in regard to faith, even though all are trusting God for salvation. With some there is quality of faith that enables them to live with inner rest and with confidence in God regardless of their circumstances. Others seem unable to stay in peace under pressure, so that anxiety, tension, sharpness and even fear are no strangers to them. Peace under pressure is certainly possible for us all but requires a high level of confidence in God. Words like "count," "Depend," "rely," "lean," "trust," "rest," and "reckon" are all words that express faith in God, both in action and also as an attitude of life. Faith is not emphasized in Scripture as something to do when you need help from God, but as a way to walk, a way of life and something that should be a constant, permanent part of our Christian lives. "Little faith may bring your soul to heaven," a sage from a bygone day declared, "But great faith will bring heaven to your soul!" Have you noticed that? Some of us are obviously experiencing a foretaste of heaven now, while others are simply endeavouring to make it to heaven, which is surely far less than our wonderful Father intends. 23 Let us change that quotation to fit into the realm of our present concern, which is the bottleneck that hinders earth from fully experiencing heaven's blessings now. "Little faith may affect your destiny, but great faith can alter a nation's total direction." This also is both wonderfully and excitingly true! Once when I was alone, on my face before God, I became deeply aware that He was asking me a question: "John, do you trust me?" My reply was like this: "Lord, I don't like your question. You know that I trust you. I trust you for your blessing on my family, for your anointing on my ministry and for the supply of my every need. Lord, you know that I trust you." He let me know that I didn't understand His question, and proceeded, "John what can you trust me to do on earth in your generation? How many people can you trust me to draw to myself while you live on the earth?" That seemed awesome! Did it make a difference to God what I believed for in that regard? I had never even thought in those vast dimensions. A Bible statement was thundering through my mind: "He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith." (2) It does make a difference! Our trust in God does make a difference to what He chooses to do. He has chosen to create a link between our faith and His activity! To me then, and even now, this was a shattering, soul-shaking thought. Initially I began in a way reverse to Abraham's. "Lord, I know I could trust you to draw fifty million in my generation. Oh, no, God, you are greater than that, I can trust you for seventy-five million." But that may be far too few for God's highest purpose for this age. "Lord," I cried in agony of spirit, "I don't know what to trust you for!" I asked him to give me clear, unmistakable, unshakable revelation of His purpose, to let me know specifically what He wanted me to trust Him for, and He did. By the grace of God, I will live all the days of my life trusting Him for that! God's dealing with me proceeded hour after hour that night. He had another question: "John what can you trust me to do in my Church in your generation?" There are a multitude of things I would like to see God do in His Church! My prayer was, "Father, please show me what you desire to do in your Church in my generation. Give me pictures in my spirit so that I can envisage and understand, and then I will trust you for that all the days of my life." How deep and numerous, how high and glorious, and how magnificent, amazing and

perfect are the things that God has prepared for those who love Him! The call of God on my life to trust Him for such things is, in all probability, by far the most important function that He has, or ever will, require of me. "All of these were dominated by faith when they died." (3) Being dominated by faith means having the quality of faith that can change the course of nations and break the restriction that hinders the flow of abundant, divine life to all who long for it. Specific Revelation Required And what more shall I say? I do not have time to talk about those "who THROUGH FAITH conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies" (4) [emphasis added]. 24 The record goes on to share about those who suffered, at times very shockingly, but triumphantly. It also tells of those who died victoriously, also, and gained a better resurrection because of it. Then this: "The world was not worthy of them ... THEY WERE ALL COMMENDED FOR THEIR FAITH" (5) [emphasis added]. They broke the bottleneck of restriction in their generation. So, can we in ours! "God, make us strong in faith!" These things are emphasized in Hebrews 11: 1. Faith was exercised in response to specific revelation from the Lord, and not on the basis of personal desire, understanding or wisdom. Has God shown you what to trust Him for in your situation, and in your land? He will if you seek Him with your whole heart. Then be unwavering in your faith for the realization of what has been revealed to you! 2. Revelation was given of something completely new and unique for the specific situation. Nobody had ever offered a sacrifice as Abel was called to do, nobody had ever escaped death as Enoch was to do because of his faith, and no one had ever built an ark as Noah was shown to do. It hadn't even ever rained before! Nobody had ever been asked to slay his son, as Abraham was. In all these ways revelation was given for something completely new. And each person exercised faith for what was shown to them by the Holy Spirit. 3. In every case those who heard God in such a personal way were willing to 'go it alone regardless of cost, in their active faith response to the Lord of their lives. They did not decide to trust God for what they considered the best thing to do. Rather, they trusted God in what He revealed to them, and then proceeded to do what He required in practical expression of their faith. Trusting and then doing is the way God would have us walk, not doing our best and trusting Him in that. 4. Triumphant results were evident in every case, but not always instantaneously, and not always in a way anyone would have anticipated. But faith made a way for God to actively step into the situation of earth in a dimension of His life and power that goes beyond the boundaries of human expectation or ability. Isn't this what is needed in the lands that were encircled by the lower portion of the hourglass in my dream? In fact, isn't this why God spoke to me in that way — so that I could trust Him for His supernatural intervention? There is nothing too hard for God! We know that—in theory, at least. But let us set ourselves to move beyond theory, by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us set ourselves not so much to have great faith as to have unwavering faith in a great God. God is great! He is great enough to cope victoriously with every lack and need in His Church on earth today, and to step into the affairs of nations in glorious manifestation of His power. We WILL move forward with faith in God, and in accordance with what He reveals to us by His Spirit! AND SO, THE BOTTLENECK WILL BE BROKEN. Amen! — It is so, and it will be so! NOW to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (6) NOW to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (7) 25

To the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, NOW and forevermore! Amen. (8)

Impulse Chapter 8

There is a sweet expression of yieldedness and responsiveness to the Lord in the old "Consecration Hymn." It is found in this couplet: Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of your love. 26 Nowadays the word "impulse" is used in everyday language in connection with impulsiveness, meaning a sudden desire, whim or inclination." No one would want to foster whimsical Christianity, though the Church is not totally devoid of it, of course. But "impulse" has different shades of meaning; such is "thrust or impetus, an impelling force or motion, an instinctive drive or urge." The word "impulsion," which is probably not used frequently, means "the act of impelling or the state of being impelled; motion produced by an impulse; propulsion; a driving force; compulsion." So, when Frances Ridley Havergal wrote of the impulse of God's love, she was thinking of being impelled into action by that wonderful love. There is a sense of thrusting forth in and by the love of Christ; it should have no trace of reluctance in it, but rather an eager and instant responding to the Holy Spirit of love. First the Natural, and Then the Spiritual To catch a fuller picture of what is involved in responding to the impulse of divine love, we need to see the beautiful parallel God has placed in the human body. Almost every part of our body is not only connected by a labyrinth of blood vessels but also by nerve fibres. These may be described as "any of the cordlike bundles of fibres that conduct impulses between the brain and spinal cord and every other part of the body." A nerve impulse is the electrical wave transmitted along a nerve fibre, following stimulation of the nerve-cell body. Can you picture this? Communication lines run throughout the human body so that messages can be sent and responded to in whatever action is called for. This is controlled from the brain — the head. God has provided that as a picture to us of His communication to us by the Holy Spirit. Inner impulse comes from the Head, requiring response from us, not in a jerking, spastic kind of way, nor with some kind of delayed reaction, but as a natural response to the propulsion of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within our human spirit. A bottleneck that limits the activity of God on earth will wondrously disappear when at least a vital minority of Christians in a land learn to live by impulsion of and to the Holy Spirit of God. Let us note this well! The Example Jesus Set Us When one reads the account of Jesus' earthly life, one is impressed by the use of the word "immediately." This is particularly noticeable in the story of Jesus walking across the water to the disciples who were rowing their boat in a storm: IMMEDIATELY Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd" (1) [emphasis added]. But Jesus IMMEDIATELY said to them: "Take courage! It is I. don't be afraid" (2) [emphasis added]. IMMEDIATELY Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "Why did you doubt?" (3) [emphasis added]. Then they were willing to take Him into the boat, and IMMEDIATELY the boat reached the shore where they were heading (4) [emphasis added]. Why did Jesus, immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, order the disciples into the boat to go ahead of Him to the other side? Surely it was some kind of inner impulse. He always did the things that His j Father asked of Him, and did nothing of His own volition or authority. Thus, we can discern that He | acted on heavenly impulse, 27 and acted on it immediately. Have you ever pondered this

statement of Jesus to Nicodemus: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit [emphasis added]." The wind is a lovely picture of those born again into the family of God. The clear implication, surely, is that we should be wholly responsive to the impulses of the Holy Spirit, until, like a yacht with sails fully spread, the blowing of the wind and the movement of the vessel are as one. That is what I have pictured as the acceptable normal standard and pattern of life in the church of my dreams. The Teaching Jesus Gave Us When the Lord Jesus prepared His followers in advance for coming adversity, He spoke of the impulsion of the Spirit: Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. AT that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (5) [emphasis added]. Jesus spoke similarly on another occasion: But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of My name. This will result in you being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict (6) [emphasis added]. What could be clearer? Jesus assured His disciples that they could confidently rely on, and respond to, the immediate impulses of the Spirit of "our Father, until what they spoke would actually be the Holy Spirit" speaking through them.' Impulse in the Early Church When one reads the Acts of the Apostles one notices the normalcy of responding to the impulses of the Spirit. It is this, in very truth that brings the sparkle of life and the release of the supernatural dimensions of God's power. When the lame man at the "Beautiful" gate of the Temple called out to Peter and John, asking for alms, it was a cry that they would have heard from that same man at that same location many a time before. Surely it was an impulse of the Holy Spirit that caused Peter and John to look straight at him, and that caused Peter to say, "Look at us!" This was followed by his taking him by the right hand, helping him to his feet, declaring, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." (7) Peter later on probably thought, "Did it really happen? Did I say that? Did I do that?" Many another person who has trusted God enough, and trusted his heart as well, and responded to the impulse of the Spirit, has done the same, with surprising results. Who can doubt that Philip was prompted by divine impulse when he ran to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch! The Spirit had said to him, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Philip ran, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (8) If he had not responded to impulse by running, an opportunity would have been lost because the eunuch would not have still been reading that amazing prophecy of Isaiah concerning Jesus and His atoning death. 28 How many opportunities are lost, not simply for us or for people who could have been touched by the Holy Spirit, but also for God to be glorified, because we have failed to respond to impulse? One shudders to think! But, bless the name of the Lord, the day comes when we will once more be simple enough in our faith and deep enough in our commitment to God to act as Peter and Philip did. To take one more instance out of many, consider Paul's vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." How beautiful the record: "After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God has called us to preach the gospel to them" (9) [emphasis added]. That vision signalled a change of the Wind, but there was no hesitation in responding to it. Paul and his companions were like the Wind,

because of their response to His impulse. Impulsion in Marriage and in the Church, there is often need in a delicate area of private life that we shall carefully consider. It is in an area where not only can we discover greater health and fulfilment in our marriages, but through which we can find a new way forward in God. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in every- thing. (10) The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. (11) Both husband and wife have the glad privilege of responding to their partner's impulse of desire, but neither have the right to reject the impulse of their partner. In the Church today, as in the world about us, every woman needs to willingly acknowledge her husband as lord of the bedroom. And men need to see that they love their wives as Christ loves the Church. Both need to come to a place where they submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. Many a wife would be thrilled and proud of her husband becoming both the man, and the man of God, that she wants him to be, if she allowed him to be what God intends him to be, the master of the bedroom. Picture of the Church Paul called wives to submit to their husbands as the Church does to Jesus Christ. If only the Church were still a model for wives to follow in its wholehearted, continuing and immediate response to the impulses of the Spirit! Today wives would do well to set an example for the Church to follow! Husbands should experience the response of wives in such a manner that they are inspired to lead the Church in response to Christ in a similar continuing and complete yieldedness to the desire of the Lord. Does the Church, or do individuals members of it, only respond to divine impulse in what could be pictured in replies like "Not tonight, I have a headache" or "I am just too tired. Don't you know how busy I have been with doing things for you like housework, laundry and cooking" or "Looking after your children wears me out" or even "Not now, Lord, it is only a couple days since I responded to you" We are called to be the bride of Christ, pure, chaste, 'wholly and exclusively His! Let us become beautiful in four responses to the impulses of His Spirit, so that He is able to be 29 to the Church all that is in His heart to be. Great and glorious days lie ahead for a people that will whisper in irrevocable commitment, "I will." Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of your love. 9

Who Runs the Church?

Chapter 9

It was the revelation of God. I was positive of that, and yet I hardly knew how the Holy Spirit had spoken to me! What do I mean by that? Let me explain. I am the kind of person who needs little sleep. Three or four hours a night is my norm, and I can get by without difficulty with less than that. Likewise, I am the kind of person who is either awake or asleep, without a drowsy twilight zone in between. It commenced as a dream, and yet I think that at times I was awake. During those times it seemed as though I was being transported elsewhere, both into dialogue with the Lord, and in viewing various situations around New Zealand. Asleep or awake? Dream, vision or simple communication between Spirit and spirit? I do not know! This I can share: In the dream I heard a businessman communing within himself. "I have built a successful business here in this city of Christchurch, and I am very prosperous. Now the time has come to expand. I will establish branches in other cities throughout the land. Then I will branch out into Australia and other countries. I will spread out, perhaps even all around the globe!" Initially the businessman seemed pleased, confident and very self-assured. He had no doubt that his product would find a ready market wherever he went. He knew that he would succeed. However, before long a worried frown furrowed his forehead. "How will I get the right men to take charge of all the branches that I establish? I need men with my outlook and acumen. I need men of integrity, loyalty and drive. My adventure into wide expansion will depend on the men I appoint to management positions." Now the scene changed. In the spirit I saw towns, cities, villages and isolated homesteads. But architecture, business houses, banks and other objects of human creation and accumulation had no part in what I saw. I saw only people, so many people. Some were gathered in small groups, some in large. Some walked alone. Again, the scene changed. The Lord Jesus was speaking. Whether He was talking to someone else or to me, I do not know. Perhaps like the businessman He was communing within himself. "I have provided salvation for the lost of earth. I have made possible a way of life that befits those who are born again into my Father's family and become my brothers and sisters." This was followed by an expression of concern. "Who can adequately lead my work in the towns and cities, and in the rural areas? Who can lead my people in the various nations of earth where the word of life in me has been spread?" The questions continued, "What kind of person do I need? Who would unswervingly carry out my Father's will, and establish my church in all the earth, so that my Father is wonderfully, fully glorified among the sons of men?" 30 It was an echo of the businessman's problem concerning the right men for management positions. Then I came to understand that the questions were being stated within my hearing because I was expected to give an answer. I had no answer! This was a problem of gigantic proportions. We all know that there are repeated rendings in the Body of Christ on earth, so frequently caused by human leadership failings. Our Choice! I wept. Wouldn't you? To think about the glorious purposes of God for His Church, and to recognize how tragically men have messed up the plan. Who is sufficient for these things? Only the Lamb is worthy! God does use imperfect and inadequate people in many ways. For many tasks He equips us super-naturally, providing for our lack by His grace. But somehow, that night I sensed that this was different. "Lord, you know! What will you do to build your Church, and bring it to completion upon the earth? Only you know. I cannot answer your questions." I was

gripped with a total silence and stillness, for a considerable length of time, I think. It was precious. It was as though I was bathed in an almost overwhelming sense of the presence of God. In my heart there was adoration of the worthy One, the Redeemer of men, and I was content to be still before Him. In fact, I could do nothing else but wait at His feet. At last I knew that He was communing with me again. "I do have an answer. I will give my people a choice. If they wish, they can appoint from among their fellows men to lead my work. There are men with vision, ability and drive who follow me." It was astounding! His word to me was, "That would be the poorer choice. It would be a tragic choice. It would further delay and mar the building of my Church." "Lord, then that is no choice," I protested. "What is the best and highest way for your church to be established in all the earth, so that it may fully carry out your present commission to it?" "Men can either choose men, or for that matter men may appoint themselves or they can accept my choice." The Lord said I have a perfect answer. I myself will lead and build my Church. I DO NOT NEED BRANCH MANAGERS. I have sent my Holy Spirit to fill that role in every place." Now it was out! The choice given to man had been spelled out to me. 31 "Lord, I am afraid!" Deep fear did grip me. How could the people of God today ever bring themselves to see that almost without exception they have allowed men to take over a function that God has reserved for "himself?" In this day the Lord God Almighty purposes to lay the axe at the roots of a crippling common denominator found in virtually every kind of church grouping that exists. It is the control of men by men, supposedly in the name of Christ. "Jesus never delegates His Lordship." What a radical, revolutionary statement that is! 'Lord' means 'boss.' _God has never intended that there be little bosses spread throughout the Church, acting as though it were theirs. A brother phoned me long distance from a city where he was visiting in ministry. "John," he asked, "what do you understand about head covering?" As I shared my understanding it dawned on me that revelation had come to Bill that I did not have. He was commencing at verse one of 1 Corinthians 11, not verse three, which is where folk usually commence when considering the issue of head covering. Paul saw that the Corinthians were looking to him for "covering," and he wanted them to see the folly of that. "Christ is the head," he wrote, "Not me." He told them that they should follow his example in the measure that he followed Christ. He expressed his appreciation for the way in which they remembered him and held to what he had taught them. But he hastened to state categorically and unequivocally that t alone is Head. This stands out clearly to me now: Unless in our local churches, fellowships and gatherings we allow Jesus | Christ to be Head in very truth, of every part of His Church, and unless we allow the Holy Spirit alone to be the decider, direction-giver and leader, we will never be what we could be and should be. God probably does more in spite of us than because of us. It really is amazing how far He reaches out with patience, grace and blessing to a very substandard Church. Bless Him for that! We need to face the fact that to designate any individual as a. "Pastor," "Bishop," "Superintendent," "Shepherd," "Apostle" or simply as "The man that we relate to" can dishonour Christ, the Head, and it does deep disservice to the lovely people of God. When men use these titles to exalt themselves above the people, or the folks themselves look to these positions rather than to the Lord, His lordship is usurped, man is uncovered, and God is dishonoured. God has a higher way! Please understand. This is not my idea! I am simply the messenger, conveying as faithfully and completely as I can that which I have first of all received from the Lord. Sooner or later we will need to come to see that we have been misled concerning the nature of leadership in the Church of Christ. The best time is now! "But surely," you may protest, "the church — the local church,

should have leaders?" YES, INDEED IT SHOULD! But your question raises another: "What is the Church?"

What Is the Church?

Chapter 10

The Church can be described in various ways. It is a living organism, the Body of Christ. In its widest sense it is all those people in all the world who have living faith in a living God, together with all who are now in heaven. In regard to any sense of form, grouping or structure there are two New Testament descriptions of the Church. Firstly, there is the CHURCH IN THE HOME. "Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19). "Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (Colossians 4:15). "To Philemon our dear friend and fellow-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier and to the church that meets in your home" (Philemon 1,2). It is widely popular to have home "cells," "groups" or "meetings" these days, but almost invariably as an adjunct or an extra to the main gatherings of some local church, and under their control and leadership. However, it is surprising how many members of the Family are finding freedom and fulfilment in home gatherings that are fully "church" to them without the need for regular meetings in church buildings or hired halls. Meetings in our homes can be very wonderful. The home atmosphere aids us in being informal, honest and unreligious. It tends to emphasize the need to bring our Lord and our faith out of the formality and isolation of the structured church and its meetings. It enables us to freely bless each other and to speak into each other's lives. We doubtless know very well that even an un-programmed and "on the spur of the moment" time that a few brothers and sisters in Jesus have, perhaps over a cup of coffee, or tea, or in 33 the sharing of a meal together, can be most blessed and uplifting to them, as well as honouring to the Lord Jesus. In among discussion of family, work or vacation plans there can, and I should, come an instruction, a song, or a revelation, j "All of these must be done for the strengthening of their church." (1) The GEOGRAPHICAL CHURCH is the predominant biblical expression of church life. Thus, there are, for example, letters to the church in Ephesus, the church in Thyatira, the church in Pergamum, and so forth. There has been widespread teaching in recent years about "Cell, congregation and celebration." It sounds good, and many have readily accepted it as a good pattern to follow. But there is a cuckoo in the nest! Where does "congregation" come from? It well may be a grouping that expresses the number of people that can be easily controlled and that can adequately provide for the financial support of "the minister" or full-time worker with a different label, the various church "programmes" and the erection and maintenance of the "church buildings." Can "congregation" not be considered the perpetuation of a humanistic structure, with laws and leadership set in place by man? In my dream the Spirit showed me people. They are the Church! The Church is people. Human structures and strictures most definitely are not. If only we could really see it! Enormous energy and expense are expended in the promulgation and perpetuation of the traditions, superstitions and kingdoms of men. With either blind prejudice or with sad deception we state that it's all for the glory of God. A city pastor, near to retirement age, shared with us. The final service of the day had ended, and the people had all departed to their homes. He wandered through the buildings — an impressive plant that had been built because of his vision and drive. He felt smugly pleased with it all. "You feel very satisfied with what you have built, don't you?" the Holy Spirit whispered in his inner ear. "Yes, Lord. I have done it

all for your glory," he replied. "You built it for yourself, not for me!" exclaimed the Lord. "Do I need plush seats, cry rooms, committee rooms, ornate furniture or stained-glass windows? Do you think that I am interested in all of the activities and programmes that you have initiated and perpetuated in this place? I am not!" How shattering that a brother was challenged by the Holy Spirit to face up to and admit that all the money, tears, energy and effort of himself and others over many years had not been spent at divine direction or for divine purposes. It was all a monument to the people's commitment to a cause rather than to Christ, and to a man's "successful" ministry — or should we say, to a man's arrogance, blind stupidity and failure! Huge quantities of "wood, hay or straw" are being used in lifetimes of effort to raise up what will be destroyed by fire on the Day.

(2) Boundary Lines The laws that men impose, the structures that they erect and the kingdoms that they establish all bring artificial separation and carnal division to the geographical church. There could be a very wise and godly elder, perhaps a brother with a pure and significant prophetic mantle, living just a few doors down the street. What heresy is it that teaches that because he doesn't belong to our church he has as no right to speak into our life, individual or corporate, and that we have no right to sit at his feet?

34 Boundary lines between groupings in the same proximity are established for the following reasons:

1. We can be unthinkingly continuing what, to us, may seem to have always been here and is thus to be accepted as the norm. We so easily accept things that are customary and reject whatever is new and different. If we continue like that how will we ever enter into the greater fullness of God's purposes for His Church today?
2. False ideas of caring for people and disciplining them can tie people to us, rather than bringing them into a strong living and growing relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no greater area where the Church needs new revelatory, radical insight than in the realm of the true nature of leadership for the Church.
3. If we believe that we have superior light, wisdom, insight, maturity or godliness we may be foolish enough to try to bind people to ourselves and our ways.
4. Some boundary lines exist because of basic spiritual insecurity in the leadership. Men feel the need to prove themselves by manifesting a competitive spirit. If their group is larger than another they feel more important and successful.
5. Manmade boundary lines are a clear indication that we have not attained to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (3) and have not learned how to lead others there.

Routine Meetings How can we be so sure that we are supposed to be in meeting after meeting after meeting? Why is this considered proof of spiritual health? Have you never heard someone say, "He is a faithful brother? He is always at the prayer meeting"? Faithful to whom, or to what? Will we never learn that external performance alone is at best a poor gauge of a man's inner condition? I asked a brother who has good Bible knowledge to do some research for me. First of all, I told him that when Moses heard from God of a way forward for his people, it seemed to include a day of rest WITHOUT MEETINGS and also three major festivals each year. "Is it true, Ralph," I asked, "That weekly synagogue meetings actually only commenced among the Jews when they were captives in Babylon?" It seemed important to know about that. Had man added extra meetings to what God had set out for His people? My second question was about the early Church. By that time the weekly synagogue meetings had become entrenched in a nation's life style. These meetings had also become a requirement because of Pharisaical tradition. "Did the early church have routine meetings every week according to the Word of God or were they a carryover from Judaism? In those early years did they in fact have such routine gatherings at all, or did that come later?" Ralph stated three things to me. Firstly, he reminded me of the verse that says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of

doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (4) I was already aware of that Scripture, and I place high value on meeting with other Christians. But isn't there a world of difference between "meeting" and "Meetings"? This then gives no indication of the nature or frequency of such meeting. I do very much question whether we "encourage one another" by some dictate that requires us to be in "Meeting" because it is Sunday morning! 35 The second thing Ralph told me was that routine meetings should always be continued because they had a long record of blessing to the Church. Honesty should cause us to admit that that isn't the only long record that routine meetings have! Anyway, I was asking about Scripture, not tradition. Perhaps Ralph's third reply was the most telling of nil. He declared quite forcefully, "Weak Christians need a lot of meetings!" Well, now! Why not rather quickly help weak Christians to draw on the grace of God, which shows up best in weak people? (5) Why keep them weak with too many meetings? The First Day of the Week But doesn't the Bible teach that we should meet together on the first day of every week? From childhood I have been taught so, haven't you? This is what I notice from the Scriptures: 1. There are six references to the first day of the week in the Gospels. (6) They all refer to the glad and glorious day when Jesus rose from the dead. Surely these references cannot be used as a biblical basis for requiring meetings every week. I would prefer to think that the resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaimed a freedom from the traditions of men and from a pressure to work for salvation, into a freedom to live on a much higher plane. 2. "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight," so we read in Acts 20:7. The above verse is the ONLY one in the whole book that speaks of a gathering on the first day of the week. It would be far-fetched, surely, to claim that this is adequate basis for teaching that we should have at least one "Meeting" every Sunday. There would be just as much authority to claim that we should only meet on the first or second Sunday after the Passover week (see verse 6) or that we should always meet in an upstairs room with many lamps (see verse 8). I cannot believe that there is any law shown in this verse, or even, an example set for regular, routine Sunday meetings. 3. The ONLY other New Testament reference to the first day of the week is found in 1 Corinthians 16:2. It reads, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that no collections will have to be made." Does that mention a "Meeting"? Of course not! It doesn't even speak of a weekly "offering." It is an instruction from Paul for individuals to set money aside for a special collection which Paul would be picking up later to take to impoverished Jewish believers. 4. Let it be noted that meeting regularly and routinely on the first day of the week was not taught by the Lord Jesus, Paul or anyone else, as far as can be learned from the sacred record. 5. We should also recall and note well that, in the things considered essential for Gentile believers by the council in Jerusalem, meetings were not included. Please understand that I am NOT teaching that people should not gather in meetings. What I am seeking to share is that there is a higher way, in which we gather not out of deadly routine and habit, but rather in response to specific direction from the Holy Spirit. "I see that this could be all right for a season," the elder of a fellowship told me, "But after a while we would need to get back to having regular meetings so that we could teach the flock." After a moment's silence, the dear brother remarked, "Now I see the difference," and he did! "Rather than having routine meetings, and seeking God for 'a word' to share at them," he said, "we should walk with the Lord with a sensitive ear to the Holy Spirit, and then call the people together whenever we have received a word from the Lord for them." 36 Men

who want to be controllers in the church will not even give consideration to the possibility of truth in what has been shared in this chapter. But the lowly in heart will! And so, will those who cry for release from the burden of their church life style. So too will those who honestly seek a walk in tender obedience to the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ himself. Open free gatherings where folks are absolutely free to gather and free not to gather. 37

Funerals and Festivals

Chapter 11

A fellowship of believers had felt for some considerable time that they should divide into two. Since they came together from different suburbs, it seemed simpler and wiser for them to have one gathering on the eastern side of the city, and another in the west. This was discussed at one stage when we were away for a weekend with their leaders and wives. There was a unanimous, peaceful assurance among them that this step was being taken at the clear direction of the Holy Spirit. One of the brothers shared again a Scripture that had been significant to them: "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." (1) These dear friends have a heart for "tent" life in the Holy Spirit. This is a day for the restoring of David's fallen tent containing the ark of God's presence (2), rather than for the re-erection of Solomon's Temple, with its massive, immovable, and externally impressive structure. God's call for us today is for the simplicity depicted in David's tent, in which our heart's desire is for the presence of God in His glory to be among us and within us, rather than for the outward show of man-made, largely inflexible and highly visible structures. Once when I was with a group of leaders in England I warned them of the danger of "reversion." Subsequently, I was asked to speak in one of their gatherings on that subject. Realizing later that it would not be helpful to give a list of "do's and don'ts" to them, I reached out to the Lord for wisdom. In the middle of the night I gained a clear impression from the Holy Spirit that if I focused on distinctives I would gain deeper insight into the dangers of reversion. In the days when I was a denominational pastor there were occasions when I heard men speak proudly of our "distinctives." These were the particular emphases of doctrine and structure that had brought us into being and that set us apart from other denominations. Doubtless they were also the areas of special importance in teaching our people the ways of God as we understood them. Today, one way or another, men still emphasize their distinctives. At most gatherings of leaders someone will start a discussion about some aspect that is of special significance to them. It may be a special emphasis on worship, plural leadership, ascension gift ministries, church building and evangelism or a score of other things. There is one main problem about distinctives. They are an expression of what God revealed to us yesterday. In the denomination it may be a distant yesterday. In the "fellowship" it may be a more recent yesterday, but the very fact that we hold to distinctives relating to yesterday's revelation puts us in clanger of reversion to the substandard churchdom we have moved on from. It seems to me that wise men in leadership will face up to the danger of reversion, especially in the second generation of their freedom in a new church life style. What about our distinctives then? How else can one describe a fellowship other than in regard to what we see as a higher way in worship, relationship and structure? The Holy Spirit showed me that night that there is only one safe distinctive. It is that we be walking in what we are hearing. That is, we are not locked into yesterday's revelation. We are gladly committed to respond to The Holy Spirit each step of the way. Today there are many of us who feel favoured in that God has shown us a way to walk in adventure some newness, freedom and love, and we are seeking to do so.

But unless we hold to the commitment of walking step by step in the ongoing revelation of God as an utmost love priority we are likely to be locked into a limited and partial understanding and experience of God's wonderful purpose for this generation. 38 Let us be determined to walk in the thrilling expectation that there are such glorious days ahead that soon the wonders of God's grace in the present will fade by comparison. There is so much more yet in God's high purposes for His people. By God's grace I walk in what I hear, even when it means walking away from, out of, or beyond what those things well may have been for a season that is now over. There is glory ahead! Decentralisation A call from God to divide a fellowship into two or more groups always appeals to me. Decentralisation is one of the principles at the heart of new things God is doing today. The charismatic movement did not hear this call clearly, even though we found such delightful freedom, blessing and heart-oneness as we gathered together in homes to worship the Lord. I pray that we may be more sensitive to the Spirit in this regard today. A desire or vision, to organise, structure, and humanly control calls for a centralising emphasis. God has a desire for us to experience variety, freshness and total freedom to walk in the Spirit, and so He calls for decentralisation. The fellowship leaders were hearing a call for their present corporate "tent:" to be destroyed. Tents are by nature quite temporary. Ultimately "so is everything else man seeks to build. There was to be something blessedly different about the terminating of the life of this fellowship. "Have a funeral for it" was the word of the Lord in the matter. It was a joyous privilege to be there! Two boards were propped up so that anyone who wished to do so could write on one of them whatever aspect of fellowship life they felt should be buried. On the other could be listed things in their personal lives that would also be interred. What a blessing to see "tradition" listed, along with "unspoken legalism," "liturgy," albeit unwritten and charismatic, "vulnerability" of a nature that brought defensive reactions, and the manmade "pastor" role. Many a local church would be the richer for the holding of a funeral at which there was a deliberate laying away of things that once may have been vibrantly alive but now are an anachronistic encumbrance to moving on in God! How strange that we tend to cling to what we know and to fear what we do not know. The word of the Lord to us would be, "Do not fear the unknown. Fear, rather, what you do know and understand. There is danger in what you now know. It can keep you locked into, and limited by, yesterday's level of life." Hear the Lord say to you, "I have more for you than you have experienced thus far. Walk with me into the unknown of my higher purposes for you. Abandon present possession that you may gain fulfilment in the future which far exceeds even your desires and imaginations." Manna was God's life provision for His people in the wilderness. But yesterday's provision stank; Let us learn a solemn lesson from their experience! Corporate Resurrection Life A funeral service, just for its own sake or just because it is a novel idea, would have little value. However, if it opens a way for corporate resurrection life to be experienced, then it is most important. The church needs resurrection life! It needs to find a way to live in the full experience of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. It needs to get beyond the quite meaningless repetition of correct words and teaching to where the presence and power of God are gloriously and dynamically experienced as a norm of life every day. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." (3) In our personal Christian lives there cannot be a full entering into our knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection until there is a fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death. (4) Yes, death, our death, is necessary! We each need to be crucified to the world, and it to us. (5) 39 So too, in our corporate life as local churches, we must demonstrate self-crucified living in identity with Jesus before we can bear in life a testimony to the resurrection

life and power of the Lord. In the church of my dreams resurrection life becomes reality not only when we reach heaven, but here on earth where we need it most, and where it can bring honour to the Lord Jesus in this old world of sin, imperfection and crying need. In the church of my dreams I have seen days of resurrections. I cannot explain it very well, but in both a literal, physical sense, and more importantly in a spiritual sense the day will come when this is astounding reality. A great joy to me in what I have seen in the spirit is that resurrections will occur where there is such maturity in Christ's followers that no one will be puffed up by such occurrences, wanting to take credit away from the God of power who alone does wondrous things. Jesus Christ, not men or movements, will become the focus of admiring, worshipping attention. The apostle Paul declared, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." (6) So, may we press on to take hold of the sum total of all that is intended for us now in the salvation of Christ that we enjoy. And may God grant us grace to speedily reach a maturity in Christ-likeness, living Spirit-controlled and Spirit-anointed lives, so that the Head of the Church will be able to be the Head of the Church in glorious, visible and full reality.

Festivals

Chapter 12

Funerals followed by festivals. Doesn't that sound great? But what are festivals? When God gave Moses instructions for the spiritual well-being of His people He set out special seasons, sometimes a week in duration and sometimes just a day, that were to be feasts to the Lord. These were periodic and spaced well apart. The English words "feast" and "festival" come from the Latin word "festus," meaning "joyful." "Festival" conveys the thought of combining in joyful expression, including the sharing of sumptuous meals. The Bible term "feasts of the LORD" (1) conveys two special thoughts. The first is of God being among His people and satisfying himself fully through their offerings of love, fellowship and commitment to Him. What exceeding joy there could be if a people gathered for a special season of ministering to the Lord's desires in such measure that He could feast to His full on what flowed from their hearts! This term also conveys the thought of a spiritual banquet for the people of God, in which they "feast on the abundance of [the Lord's] house;/ [and] drink from [His] river of delights." (2) Imagine the most lavish banquet possible, with great abundance of every delicacy, and a boundless supply of refreshing beverages. Then transfer the thought from the natural realm to the realm of the Spirit. That would be a festival indeed! Doesn't your heart cry out for a festival like that, where heaven's abundant banquet is your portion in addition to appetizing and satisfying meals, and where there is a "fountain of life" (3) flowing, as well as naturally thirst-slaking drinks being available? A festival involves leaving aside activities and involvements that are normally an integral part of our lives, and it involves our separating ourselves to a short period of full involvement with the Lord and with one another. A week set aside like that from time to time would be a lovely deterrent to our becoming too engrossed in earthly things. It would also cause a deeper linking of hearts among the people of God. Surely, we have known retreats or conferences where we have experienced such things. The phrase "feast with you" includes the thought of "being one with you." This raises the thought of something much deeper than a superficial agreement to be doing the same thing at the same time. It suggests heart harmony and mutual eagerness to sit together at the Master's feet in submission and love, recognizing that He alone can nourish and satisfy our inner beings. Preparation for a Festival Prior preparation is a theme that wends its way through Scripture, being applied to many aspects of Life. An angel of the Lord announced to Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son who would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (4) What a precious ministry! John referred to "the day of Preparation of Passover Week." (5) The times of preparation for the Easter gatherings in Dublin, which we have referred to earlier in this book, were themselves a significant season in our lives. In fact, so deeply did the Holy Spirit touch our lives and reveal the Father to us, that we could have been completely satisfied had the conference not been held after all! It was at that time that God gave me deep dissatisfaction with routine meetings, which well may be defined as gatherings without previously given direction and without adequate spiritual preparation. About a month later there was to be a "celebration" meeting, just before our leaving Ireland. I dreaded the thought of just another celebration, and told friends, "If there isn't a fuller dimension to celebration in this gathering, then I think I will delete that word from my vocabulary." It would have been so easy for most people to drift

into such a meeting, counting on a leader or two and a guest speaker to undertake whatever preparation was necessary. Thank God that it was another very special evening because adequate preparation had been made. Surely weeks of special times of seeking God and hearing from Him should precede a spiritual festival. What blessing there would be in that! There was a brother in Ireland who was freed from a years-long bondage to tobacco the day before the Easter conference began. He had heard of the preparation and expectation others were involved with, and so began reaching out to his Lord ahead of time as well. There was a woman whose life was transformed as the Holy Spirit dealt deeply with her before the start of a meeting. There had been prior preparation! There have been occasions in meetings when I have felt that the first thirty minutes or more have been involved with personal heart dealing and aspects of seeking God which should have taken place well before the gathering. When people are absorbed with things of work and family most of the week, and even right up to meeting time, it is impossible for them to come in at the level of grace and experience that ought to be the norm. To be as aware of God's presence and as sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we ought, prior preparation is absolutely essential. Festival Rest One of the precious ingredients God gave Moses for festivals was rest. The Feast of Tabernacles began and ended with a day of rest. The Sabbath was a day of rest. God even instructed that the land should rest for a year every seventh year. How different from so many conferences, retreats and crusades we have attended! How often people return to their homes exhausted to a point where it is difficult not to "flop" physically, emotionally, and spiritually as well. How different it would be to return home relaxed, refreshed and inspired. Why not have a festival in which the overall emphasis is to rejoice in the Lord, for, say, seven days, which is what happened at the Feast of Tabernacles? Why does there have to be so much preaching? Why do there have to be so many formal meetings? Why are we pressured to do so many things? If we come together just to honour the Lord, and to allow Him to speak as and when He chooses, it will be very different. 41 The main reason for so much teaching and preaching is that in the modern Western world the Church has elevated reason above revelation, activity above communing with God, and reliance on human ability above having confidence in the Lord. There IS a rest for the people of God, and we should make every effort to enter into it. (6) Hardness of heart and unbelief keep us from the rest of God. It is not, of course, a rest of idleness, but it is a rest of confidence in God, and a rest from activity other than that which is clearly selected and directed by the Holy Spirit. The New Testament Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians, "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." Obviously, Paul recognized that there were aspects of the feasts God gave to Moses for the children of Israel that have no place in the New Testament church. He did seem to encourage, however, that a Passover festival be held, but with Jesus the Lamb of God at the centre of it. In the church of my dreams there are amazing festivals! They are occasions when God manifests himself in, among and upon His people. They are seasons when at times His boundless love and amazing power cause us all to be silently prostrate before God, and at other times we will be joyously praising Him with all of our hearts and with all of our strength. They are festivals where there are no undercurrents of people wanting their own way, of leadership wanting to manipulate and dominate, or of human planning placing restriction on what the Holy Spirit desires for the people of God. They are seasons following which people will be declaring with

awe and amazement, "I saw the Lord," and, "I heard the Lord." Festival Offerings At the Festival of Tabernacles many offerings were brought to the Lord God. Every day offerings were made to him. People brought the payment of vows, freewill offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings and fellowship or peace offerings. In the New Testament we are encouraged to bring offerings and sacrifices of a higher order, and we are instructed to bring our offerings with a right heart attitude. Our offerings to God must be preceded by reconciliation with our brothers: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (7) The Lord Jesus placed mercy above the bringing of sacrifices: "But go and learn what this means; 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (8) He also declared, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (9) Other offerings and sacrifices detailed in the New Testament are: 1. OURSELVES "Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship." 10) 2. A LIFE OF LOVE: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (11) [emphasis added]. 3. SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES - DECLARING HIS PRAISES: "You... are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (12) [emphasis added]. 4. PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL — OFFERING THE GENTILES: "I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (13) [emphasis added]. Verses like that give a different perspective of sharing the good news, and of our attitude towards those who come to salvation in Christ Jesus. Both the sowing and the gathered harvest should be offered in love to the Lord. 5. FINANCIAL GIVING: "I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (14) [emphasis added]. 6. PRAISE, DOING GOOD, SHARING: "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (15) [emphasis added]. 7. PRAYERS AND PETITIONS: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission" (16) [emphasis added]. 8. A "DRINK OFFERING": "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (17) [emphasis added]. "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So, you too should be glad and rejoice with me" (18) [emphasis added]. What yieldedness! What faith! What total commitment is involved in the offerings we read about in the 11M o w Testament. What a challenge there is to us in this! Our

living such a life is very fragrant to God. How very special would be a festival where this kind of spirit was a common denominator, not only during the days of the festival but all the year around. Can you now share my excitement in the way that here and there around the globe there are pioneering saints who have caught the call to "funerals and festivals," and have responded to this call from God? "You are a man of tomorrow," a prophetic word came to me. Yes, my heart is in the tomorrow of the church of my dreams. Can you hear the Holy Spirit calling you to come with me, even now, into the fuller life that is to be experienced at this time by becoming a forerunner also? Amen! 43

The Nature of Leadership

Chapter 13

In the church of my dreams there is a quality of leadership that we probably all desire to see functioning but find hard even to describe. Here or there we have commented about some person or other, "If only all church leaders were like that!" In the New Testament there are various words used for such terms as "authority" and "rule" in connection with leadership, and they frequently are open to the possibility of a wide range of interpretation and understanding. For example, there is a variance of meaning between "Obey your leaders," "Obey your spiritual leaders," "Remember those who lead you" and "Be mindful of those who are guiding you." (1) In our day there is a major danger of using the kinds of authority found in the world about us as a yardstick for our understanding. This will never do! We cannot compare leadership in the church with officer ship in military forces, nor with management of business establishments, nor yet with the "authority of a politician in power. Because of the range of possible interpretive translations, it is of utmost importance to have a basic understanding of essential biblically stated qualities and descriptions of leaders. This will provide boundary lines for our understanding of God's purposes in the realm of leadership.

Servanthood In a call to the servanthood of leadership there is a clear call to exhibit true Christ likeness. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who ... made Himself nothing, / taking the very nature of a servant, / being made in human likeness. / And being found in appearance as a man, / He humbled Himself / and became obedient to death —/ even the death on a cross." (2) What an example of servanthood Jesus is! Isn't it interesting to note Paul's comment (quoted above) that to be human is to have the nature of a servant? Of course, sin has caused fallen man to want to dominate, manipulate and control. But we were not made for that. A very precious brother in "ministry" told me that when he reached out to the Lord concerning his present role and position, the Lord simply called him to make himself "of no reputation." We are called to live so that we have a good reputation, but not to aspire to a high reputation. How specific and unequivocal is Jesus' call for leaders to have a servant heart: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many." (3) On one of our visits to South Africa I was asked by the leaders in a certain church situation whether I had a specific word from God for them before we left. "Yes," I replied, "The Lord says, 'If you want to experience my glory, you need to come to where you have servant hearts!'" To that I was told, "Oh, we understand that. It is a part of our teaching." My final word: "You will excuse me, but unlike in New Zealand it is quite usual for people here to have servants. So, you will understand if I tell you that you don't look like servants, you don't speak like servants, you don't dress like servants, and you do not act like Servants either!" It is easy for leaders to be blind at this point. It just isn't good enough to justify either your position or your actions by claiming to serve the local church that you feel you have a right to exercise authority in. A general may claim that he serves the army by leading it, and while his leadership may bring benefit to the ranks, every soldier in the force is absolutely clear about who is serving whom! A servant has no right to direct

or control. Any authority he has is limited to carrying out the expressed will of his master. Quite some time ago the Holy Spirit linked two scriptures in my understanding. The first one is, "God opposes the proud / but gives grace to the humble." (4) The other is, "But to each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it," (5) which is in the context of the people-gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor teachers. When these two verses are linked they show that it is a contradiction of terms to even think of a proud apostle, or proud leaders of any other kind. A man may carry out the same functions as an apostle, but if there is pride in his heart then he does not have a valid ministry. He is not an apostle, but a counterfeit, a fraud. A servant role leaves no place for pride in the heart. It is fully accurate to translate, "Christ Jesus... took the very nature of a SLAVE." (6) Little wonder the Amplified Bible says, "Let this same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. — Let him be your example in humility." (7) A slave can claim no rights and privileges, no possessions, and authority to control others. This is a biblical description of spiritual leadership. Fellow leaders, ponder that! Leading by Example Wasn't it sad that Jesus had to tell people about the teachers of the law and the Pharisees: They "sit in Moses' seat. So, you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach"? (8) Paul limited his request for people to follow him. "Follow my example," he exhorted them, "[only] as I follow the example of Christ." (9) He only wanted people to follow him in the measure in which he set them an example of Christ-likeness. As leaders we are challenged, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care,... eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but BEING EXAMPLES TO THE FLOCK" (10) [emphasis added]. If this is the pattern we set for those we care about, they will never face the agony of having to declare, "We must obey God rather than men!" (11) In the same context it was stated, "God has given [the Holy Spirit] to those who obey HIM" (12) [emphasis added]. "Our right to give people direction and counsel must be limited to what God's will is for them, and whatever they are specifically hearing from the Holy Spirit. For example, many leaders have built within their people a sense of duty and obligation to attend, say, two meetings on Sunday plus a Wednesday night gathering. Couldn't it be possible for the Lord to urge someone to stay at home for weeks on end, just being what they ought to be to their family, and finding extra time to be still and alone before God? How wise the leadership has taught their people to "hear God clearly and consistently for themselves, and to respond to His voice. The thought of example detracts from a manmade role of headship and challenges us to "a headship." A part of the reason for our need to be manifesting servanthood from the heart is so that the Headship of Jesus is clearly seen, proclaimed, and honoured. Fellow leader, let me challenge you. I will give you a list of areas in which you with me doubtless aspire to be an example. Please ask your wife and each of your children, plus perhaps some close friend 45 who can be frank and honest, to grade you on a scale of one to ten on the quality of your example hood. Please be honest before God without trying to justify yourself or make excuses. I trust that this will not so much challenge you to "try harder," but challenge you to reach out to God for grace to be the man of God He wants you to be. Here is the list: HOW WELL BY EXAMPLE DO I TEACH ABOUT...? 15. Light-spiritedness? 16. A caring concern for people? 17. Ceaseless joy? 18. A wholesome marriage? 19. Patience? 20. Being a cheerful giver? 21. Being a gracious receiver? 22. Disciplining in wise love? 23. Being an overcomer? 24. Giving honour? 25. Constant faith? 26. Being an encourager? 27. Being a friend of sinners? 28. Aloneness with God? 29. Financial wisdom? 30. Being an inspiring example? Of course, we are not perfect! The call of Jesus to us to "be perfect,

therefore, as your heaven Father is perfect" (13) must surely be a call to perfection of motive and desire, rather than a call to perfect performance. "Love is the fulfilment of the law" (14) both because love is involved in the greatest commandments and also because it is in the realm of motive and heart desire. To be what we ought to be there, is to fulfil the law and to be (motivationally) perfect before God. With this He is well pleased! It is true that others cannot perfectly access our motives. In fact, that is a major area in which we should not judge lest we be judged. (15) notwithstanding, those who are near and dear to us are usually fairly accurate in assessing even the hidden things of our hearts. Surely, we desire such transparency of spirit that we clearly and obviously display a likeness to Jesus that is a challenging example for others to follow. A Ministry of Glory Glory is a difficult concept to comprehend but unless we have some concept of the glory of God, and deep desire for it, we will never understand or enter into the fullness of God's purposes. I sought to write (about it in the little book *Your Life — His Glory*. In the church of my dreams I see God being wonderfully glorified in His Body on earth. He has shared with me about it in many visions and dreams He is a God of great glory, and He has provided for us a ministry of the Spirit that is glorious. This ministry of glory is described as the ministry that brings righteousness, a ministry of surpassing glory and a ministry of glory that lasts. (16) The promise of a present process of change into increasing glory is very beautiful: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (17) Hallelujah! A Ministry in the Holy Spirit that Manifests the Glory of God Has These Characteristics:

1. The manifest presence of God. How I delight to think about this aspect of the church in my dreams: Awesome, breath-taking revelations of God actually present and active in and among His people. That is glory indeed!
1. Servanthood?
2. Quality attitudes?
3. Hiddenness?
4. Consistency?
5. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit?
6. Punctuality
7. Living in the sphere of the Spirit?
8. Reality?
9. Pure motivation?
10. Spiritual growth?
11. Being a worshipper and praiser?
12. Living in rest?
13. Inner fire?
14. Thoughtfulness?

46 2. Pulsating, abundant, overflowing life. It is life that shows itself in vibrant spiritual health and remarkable spiritual growth as well as in a beautiful buoyancy of faith.

3. A spirit of adventurous freedom in the Holy Spirit. Where there is a ministry of the Spirit in glory there is a level and quality of life in God which makes laws and rules totally superfluous. This is because the requirements of God are written in our hearts, and our hearts are fixed in God! We often grieve because of the bondage of law that binds believers in a relentless grip. Because men assume a carnal, un-Christ-like place of ruling over other believers, it has almost universally brought the Church under the rule of law rather than into the Gospel of grace.
4. A glad dependence on God. How much better this is than an immature dependence on man. We challenged the leaders of what would be classified as a strong and healthy church: "Have you taught your people to rely on the wisdom of your counselling, the quality of your teaching, the godliness of your leadership and the importance of your meetings, rather than to rely on the grace of God?" Every leader needs to face such a question! An elder we know, and love challenged a brother who had assumed the dominant leadership role in their fellowship, "If you were to go overseas for a year, what would happen to the fellowship? Would that not be a test of whether it is a building of the Lord, or something that depends on your active presence?" Too often what appears like a strong and healthy church has only been built by the ability drive and vision or ambition of man. When the man goes, the building collapses! Having looked at these basic requirements for spiritual leadership, we will delve a little deeper into the true nature of such leadership. 47

Authority in the Church

Chapter 14

A consideration of all the Scriptures using the word authority" gives a person some interesting insights. At the heart of it is the question of who gives the right or privilege that is being exercised. In other words, who is the author of the authority? The privilege of authority can only have as much strength and validity as the author himself has, or as much as he chooses to give within his own limitation of power. When we read of "Herod's jurisdiction " we are reading of the limit of his authority. (1) When Paul travelled with authority from the chief priests, and on their authority put many of the saints in prison, (2) he was moving within the area in which they claimed authority. Divine Authority True authority originates in God. His authority is underived. He has total right and absolute authority to do as He chooses, and to set the boundaries of all other (derived) authority. "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority" (3) [emphasis added]. Jesus taught "as one who had authority" (4) [emphasis added]. He declared, "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (5) [emphasis added], and, in fact, claimed quite categorically, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (6) [emphasis added]. It is important to see that "Christ... is the head over every power and authority" (7) [emphasis added] because God "raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." (8) Jesus "is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him." (9) So, we see that to be exercised in its true realm, any human authority must always be in submission to divine authority. Anything else may be approved by man but would be in rebellion to God. **JESUS CLAIMED OR EXERCISED AUTHORITY IN THE FOLLOWING REALMS:** 1. To give authority. To those who received Him and believed on Him He gave authority to become children of God. (10) When He sent out His disciples He gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. (11) 2. Teaching authority. He taught as one having: authority. (12) This mystified the chief priests and elders because they did not understand where His authority came from. (13) 3. To forgive sins. He demonstrated this authority by healing a paralytic man, on the basis that He forgave Him his sins. (14) 4. To judge. His Father has (underived) life in himself and granted the Son to have (underived) life in himself. And He gave Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man. (15) 5. Authority over other authority. Jesus disarmed the (demonic) powers and authorities. He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (16) **Personal Authority of the Believer** 49 God in His good grace has given privileges (rights, authority) to those who are His. Here is a list of them: 1. A place in the family of God. This is what John 1:12, paraphrased above, states. Being led by the Spirit of God, we are sons of God. For we did not receive a spirit that makes us slaves of fear, but we received the spirit of son ship, so that it has become natural for us to cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (17) There is a brother in New Zealand who writes to us, mentioning things such as "Dad said to me" and "Dad has been showing me some precious new things." Calling God "Dad" is saying, "Abba," from the spirit of son ship. Lovely, isn't it? 2. Freedom. Father has rescued us from the dominion (authority) of darkness and

brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. (18) Peter told Ananias that his property had belonged to him, and that when he had sold it the money had been at his disposal. (19) Ananias had had a right of choice concerning the sale and concerning the disposition of the proceeds. Of course, our right of choice is limited to choosing within the will of God, but He is often just as happy with whatever we choose. Another limitation to our freedom: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom [authority] does not become a stumbling block to the weak." (20) Yet another boundary to our freedom is to recognize that the principle of human authorities and their different levels is established by God. To rebel against that would be to rebel against what God has instituted. (21) This is not to say that every person in authority is put there by God, or that He endorses either their action or their authority. 3. Adequate provision. Paul asked, "Don't we have the right to food and drink? ... to take a believing wife along with us ... right of support?" (22) He did proceed, however, to indicate that he chose not to exercise the right. We can be confident of God supplying all of our needs. (23) With the certainty of the experience of years, David proclaimed, "I was young and now I am old, / yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken/ or their children begging bread." (24) 4. Right to the tree of life. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right [authority] to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." (25) Authority in the Church There is less stated in the Bible about authority in the Church than is stated about the two areas we have just considered. We have already noted that when Jesus sent His disciples out on one occasion, He gave them power and authority to drive out demons and to cure diseases. (26) When Jesus sent them forth to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them, He stated that He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and also that He would be with them "perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion — to the [very] close and consummation of the age." (27) The clear implication is that He was giving them authority to go on His behalf. Paul spoke in an interesting way of the authority that had been given to him. In both 2 Corinthians 10:8 and 2 Corinthians 13:10 he described it as the authority the Lord gave him (us) for building up, not for tearing down. 50 Should not every leader recognize that he may have authority for building up, but that he has no authority to tear down? We need the help of God to know the difference. May we have open hearts to receive understanding from Him, lest we seek to tear down what He chooses to be built up, and lest our prejudice or pride blind us from the awareness of what we are really doing in the sight of God. Other Bible Words for Authority So far all of the verses quoted in this chapter come from one original word, which is used 103 times in the New Testament. There are 6 other words, used 19 times in total. Words Not Used for Christian Leaders 1. There is a word used three times that means "of great authority, able, powerful one, potentate." "And Mary said ... He has brought down rulers from their thrones/ but has lifted up the humble" (28) [emphasis added]. "... God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (29) [emphasis added]. The third reference is to the Ethiopian eunuch. (30) 2. There is a word used twice that means "Eminent place, excellency a holding over," "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God" (31) [emphasis added]. [Prayers, etc.] "for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (32) [emphasis added]. 3. There are two words, used six times in all, that mean "to exercise authority upon; to use or take privilege." These words are used concerning a wife not having sole control over her body, and her husband likewise over his. (33) They are used to describe the way in which the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over their subjects. (34) The same word was

used by Paul: " 'Everything is permissible for me' —but I will not be mastered by anything" (35) [emphasis added]. 4. There is a word used once that means "authenticity—or lack of; to usurp; to use one's own armour." "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (36) [emphasis added]. 5. There is a word used seven times that means "authority, an injunction, a commandment." The emphasis of this word seems to be particularly upon commandment, and the word is used to speak of human action in response to a divine command. Paul, who alone used this particular word, wrote of his being "An apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope." (37) We may be given some recognition or position by men, but unless there is a command of God behind it, it is quite worthless. He shared his judgment concerning virgins "as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy," but quickly acknowledged, "I have no command from the Lord" in the matter. (38) Paul spoke of What has now been "revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God" (39) [emphasis added], and of his ministry as "the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour" (40) [emphasis added], and admonished Titus to "Encourage and rebuke with 51 all authority" (41) [emphasis added]. In the context of the other uses of His word it is clear that Titus' authority was to be his obedience to the command of God.

Summary Concerning Authority

The quotation of so many Scriptures may have made heavy reading for some, but we have wanted to establish a clear biblical basis for our consideration of an area that has brought misunderstanding, misery and pain to many folk, and yet should be so releasing to believers and glorifying to God.

WE CAN BE ASSURED THAT AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST DOES INCLUDE:

1. The need to recognize the absolute authority of God, and to be fully yielded to Him.
2. The privilege of living a full life as children of the living God.
3. A need to be hearing God so that we can pass on what He has revealed to us, and to be encouraging others to come to the place where they clearly and consistently understand and respond to the persuasions of the Holy Spirit.
4. A challenge to provide a low-profile leadership that is marked by an example of following Christ so that other Christians will be encouraged to be following Him, not us.
5. The right of every Christian to follow the instructions of the Lord for their lives as He continues to show them each step of the way they are to walk. Involved in this is the right to act differently from others, if that is the request of the Lord to us, and to accept such differences in each other without pressure or legalism (even if unstated) to conform to our perspective of the will of God.

WE CAN BE ASSURED THAT AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST DOES NOT INCLUDE:

1. A right to tear down.
2. A right to usurp, or take to ourselves, authority that God does not give, or to take authority beyond the limits he sets.
3. A right to "wear our own armour" of ability to control, dominate, lead, inspire, or instigate.
4. A right to exercise authority as unbelievers do in the world about us.
5. A right to act as a judge or a ruler over an individual or a people.
6. The right to initiate what we think is best for the Church, or for any individual child of God.
7. To act in a dictatorial manner.
8. To think that "official" appointment by church councils, or men acting in any capacity whatsoever, gives us any spiritual authority or right of authority over fellow believers.

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Functional Leading

Chapter 15

In this final chapter on leadership we shall consider the areas and nature of responsibility that God gives to leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ, as well as make further comment about the attitudes and character God calls such men to possess and exhibit. Jesus, the Leader Supreme Elders are called to be shepherds, but Jesus is the great Shepherd. Elders are chosen to lead and guide, but Jesus is the supreme Leader of the church. Elders are required to keep watch over the flock, and yet we need to remember that this is a vital part of the ministry for which the Holy Spirit has ultimate responsibility in the Church of Christ on earth. "... Bethlehem... out of you will come a ruler / who will be the shepherd of My people ..." (1) [emphasis added]. "For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water" (2) [emphasis added]. There is comfort in the realization that although at best we who have leadership responsibilities in the Church of God are limited and imperfect, yet our mighty Lord is perfect in all His ways, and He has declared, "I will build My church." (3) In addition to that, the blessed Holy Spirit of God is constant in his activity within us to bring us into all truth, and into the likeness of the Son of God. Called to Be Leading Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible was the basis for my research of "authority" words. In this chapter the same source has been used to examine words for "rule" in connection with men who are called to shepherd the people of God. The Amplified Bible tells us, "Obey your spiritual leaders and submit to them." (4) Whatever the translation used, this has been a verse we have heard men to justify their rule" over people, even though — Jesus used exactly the same word to say, "The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves." Spiritual Leaders The term "spiritual leaders" has a special challenge in it, has it not? To be leading in the realm of the Spirit is a tremendous challenge. If our people wish to respond to a growing inner urge to prayerfulness, we should already be leading in that area. If there is an awareness of a need to be expressing the love of Christ more purely and fully, then our spiritual leadership should be lighting up the path as we manifest true leading ability in that area of life. To be leading, in the sense of moving ahead of others in experiential living, is the call of God to us, if we are indeed called to be leaders. What a challenge! Pause to think over areas such as holy and godly living, consistent confidence in God being manifested by 53 inner calm and joyful assurance, concerned, prayerful and loving endeavour to befriend people who do not yet know the Lord Jesus and His saving grace, and also the area of sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in His speaking and leading. Which is to name but a few areas where we would do well to set ourselves to excel in spiritual leadership! Such consideration should deliver us from any trace of a "superiority" attitude, as we discern how absolutely dependent we ourselves are on the grace of God. If an understanding of our own experience and ability causes a lessening of an honest admission of our utter dependence on the grace of God, then our ability and experience are weak points that hinder us from being spiritual leaders. Dependence on natural ability is a spiritual character flaw! When told in England about a certain situation I was to be involved in, "John, you are just the man for it," my reply was, "Yes, I am just the man for it, because I know that my ability and experience are insufficient for redemptively effective, God-glorifying ministry. I am just the man for it because I know how to avail myself of the grace of God!" That is finding a way to be

a spiritual leader in such a manner that God is honoured for what He does through us, rather than we being the focus of attention because of our wisdom and capability. "To guide," "to lead," "to lead out," and "to go before" are a strong emphasis in the meaning of the words sometimes translated "rule" in the New Testament. Called to Be Shepherding This is a call to undertake certain functions and not a call to hold an "office" of some kind. My understanding is that the Bible teaches that there is only one officeholder in the Christian church, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the great Head of the Church. Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You." Jesus said, "Take care of My sheep" (5) [emphasis added]. To the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul said, "Be shepherds [tend and feed and guide — Amplified] of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood." (6) Writing specifically to elders, Peter urged them, "Tend — nurture, guard, guide and fold — the flock of God ..." (7) Yes, it is His Church. The sheep are His, too! Which means that we should see ourselves fitting into the story Jesus told: "Suppose one of you, had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So, you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty' " (8) [emphasis added]. From this story we can remind ourselves of these things: 1. The Bible shepherd held a lowly, menial position with little honour attached to it. It was a humble servant role. 2. The Bible shepherd was not a "boss" but a servant. He did what he was told by his master, who retained to himself the overall control of the flock. Jesus made crystal-clear to Peter that the sheep were not Peter's, but His: "Tend My sheep." 3. The Bible flock was always small, so the shepherd knew each sheep by name, and had ample time not only to care for each one individually, but also just to sit on the hillside and watch over them. He didn't need dogs to control the sheep as modern farmers generally do because of the size of their flock. 4. The Bible shepherd walked ahead of the flock, leading the way to green pastures, and into new territory. He walked as they walked, experiencing with them the heat of the sun and the ruggedness of the way. Again, this is different from the motorized transport modern farmers tend to use. 5. Shepherds were not to expect praise or special treatment from their master. They were not to expect notice to be drawn to the fact that they carried out what they were instructed to do. 6. Did you notice, "For the Lamb ... will be their shepherd," in a verse quoted earlier in this chapter? Can you see that we need to reverse that statement concerning ourselves — the shepherds should be lambs? We may have a shepherd role, but we are also a part of the flock, and not a superior species of some kind. Called to Be Watching Over In his final exhortation and admonition to the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul counselled them, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God." (9) It is well worth noting that not only does the Church belong to God, but also that it is the Holy Spirit who places us as elders, to shepherd and oversee the flock. man has selected man for office. However, recognition By the Church of the Holy Spirit's action in giving men responsibilities in the Church is correct and proper. The Nature of "Watching" If as elders we watch over ourselves in a wise, healthy, mature, brotherly and godly manner, then we will know how to watch over — and thus be overseers of — the portion of the flock entrusted to us. Normally elders do this through spending quality time together not only in meaningful times of worship, prayer and hearing God

together, but also in enjoyable fellowship, honest sharing, and true comradeship. Keeping this as a "yardstick" or "plumb line," let us give attention to "Be on guard for [ourselves] and for all the flock..." If we are to watch over the flock in the same way we do one another, we will obviously need to find a way to have small flocks, just as in Bible times. The word "consider" is used frequently in the New International Version of the Bible to express the same, "rule" word that is based in Hebrews 13:17. Here is an example: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." (10) [emphasis added] The challenge to consider, or to show consideration to, the flock, thoughtfully and lovingly keeping it in mind, is important. It is the Flock of God that should be 55 uppermost in our desires, emphases and activity, and not "The work," "The church," "Our programme" or "Our ministry"! We were, and are, the main consideration of the Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep. Let us be like Him. It is always tragic to see the way zealous, misguided leaders injure sheep under their care by giving overriding importance to their own ambition and goals for the church. Does this tend to be more so with younger leaders than with men of fifty years of age or more? Perhaps there is a parallel in the business world, of young men who seek to excel, and thus to "climb the ladder" and "reach the top of the tree." There is a way to harness the strength, zeal and vision of youth with the wisdom, patience and spiritual discernment of maturity. Find it! In the call to us to be shepherds of God's flock we would do well to pray into reality in our lives the following statement: Not (as arrogant, dictatorial and overbearing persons) domineering over those in your charge but being examples — patterns and models of Christian living — to the flock (the congregation). (11) As a final comment about leadership, let me point out to you that being a pattern — model — example for the flock is a unique challenge. It has in it the thought of every member of the Church becoming like you (and me, of course,) and, because of that, becoming like Jesus! Imperfections and follies in the Church are more likely to be because of the flawed example of leadership than is comfortable to consider. But how wonderful that we can be spiritual leaders until her Christ-likeness causes the Church to be radiant and beautiful, a bride without flaw or blemish, and without any malfunction or sign of aging. God give me grace to be what I have been called to be! May this be so in such a way that you find supreme delight in what the Church becomes because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit through those who nurture the flock of God. Amen. 56

The David Church

Chapter 16

What a strange question! I awoke with this question ringing in my ears: "When did King Saul die?" My initial reaction was, "Who cares! I have no idea when he died, and don't see that it matters." The question persisted within me, and I realized that the Holy Spirit was wanting to share something with me. "Lord, when did King Saul die?" I enquired. "King Saul died when David was ready to reign." God used even Saul's godless and unreasonable vindictiveness to mould David into a man after his own heart. (1) When David had attained a good level of maturity, God brought him to the throne. Perhaps that maturity is symbolized by the statement "David was thirty years old when he became king." (2) It is interesting to note that God dealt similarly with Joseph over years of adversity, developing godly character and mature spiritual understanding. Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (3) Wasn't Jesus thirty years old when He began His public ministry? There are seasons in the purposes of God, and times of development and preparation before His full purposes become reality. It is good to come to an understanding of what things God does instantaneously, and what things God does progressively. There is also a timing in the activity of God, whether it is to accomplish something immediately or in a process of development over a period of time. The King Saul Church When the people pled with Samuel, "Give us a king to lead us," Samuel was displeased. As he prayed, the Lord told him, "It is not you they have rejected as their king, but Me." (4) Saul is a picture of a substandard church that bases its values on human reasoning and understanding, as well as on human organization and control. He seemed the ideal choice as king. Saul had marvellous natural credentials to lead the people. His dad was mighty and wealthy, a man of standing and wide recognition. Saul was an impressive man by human measurement. His youthfulness gave indication of drive and vision. He is described as having been without equal among the Israelites. (5) King Saul stood head and shoulders above everyone else. Little wonder, with that in mind, that men have used him as a picture of the "head-and-shoulders church" — ruled by the brain and brawn of human leadership. Human wisdom, linked with human formidability, have made up a greater portion of the life mid form of traditional churchdom than most folk would be willing to recognize or acknowledge. If the efforts and wisdom of men could establish < God's kingdom on earth in the hearts of men, this present generation would surely have achieved that by now. But such is not the way of God! These humanistic traits are clearly typified in the life of King Saul, in these ways: 1. His obedience to God was limited and compromised by what seemed to him to be faultless reasoning. He greeted Samuel with, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD'S instructions." When pressed on the point he admitted that there had been some exceptions made — supposedly — for God's glory! 2. When confronted by Samuel's uncompromising "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" Saul sought to justify his actions, and to place blame on others: "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and the cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." After a while he also admitted that he had brought back Agag, king of the Amalekites, contrary to the specific direction of God. This was probably a normal procedure so that kings could boast of their accomplishments and superiority.

There was no repentance in Saul's heart. God had very clearly instructed him, "Attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare... cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys," but he dared to justify his actions as undertaken for God's sake. (6) 3. We can always "prove" that we are right, but is the Lord convinced? one Proverb asks. (7) Man can justify himself to man, and by natural reasoning men can "prove" that their church structures are proper and correct and are acceptable to God. Saul's actions and attitudes brought divine rejection. Similar actions in the church will do the same. Some years ago, I carried a burden before the Lord for a local church where the pastor was very gently seeking to share with the congregation new dimensions of life in the Holy Spirit. He sought to encourage them to fuller dimensions of worship and praise to God. There came a night when a "member' meeting" was held. The pastor told them that he was willing to do whatever the majority of them chose — either to revert to the traditional ways that were dear to some, or to move on into what others believed was the call of God for them all. Just over fifty percent of those gathered preferred the church to stay the way it had always been, rather than to give attention to the challenge of God to move on with Him into the fuller and more glorious purposes He had for them. After hearing what had happened, I sought the face of the Lord. "What shall I pray for that man, and those people now?" I asked. 58 The reply I received seemed unmistakably clear. It shook me! "Do not pray for them again, for they have grieved me deeply. Although I have been patient and gentle with them, they have rejected me. In my anger I will not turn to them with blessing and favour until this generation has passed on, and another generation chooses to walk in my ways." To consider the biblical expressions of God's anger with His people is a heart touching experience. God is just the same today! David: The Man God Chose "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (8) Man, looking on the outward appearance, chose Saul as king. God, looking on the heart, chose David. "The LORD has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of His people." (9) David was the least likely choice. Had the selection been left to Samuel he would have chosen a man by his appearance and height (10) — another Saul! These things are obvious in David's life: 1. He loved God with his whole heart. To read the many expressions of his love for God in the Psalms can be a challenge and inspiration to us today, even though we live in a day when we have been brought to salvation by the supreme expression of God's love at Calvary. In addition to that, the Spirit of love dwells within us, bringing forth His fruit of love. "God's love has been poured into our hearts, and still floods them" (11) because of the activity of the Holy Spirit within us. Oh yes, unquestionably, David loved his God! 2. David enjoyed God's favour. Stephen made that plain (12) immediately prior to triumphantly facing death by stoning. 3. David was imperfect. He made foolish, serious, even tragic, mistakes. But he was quick to repent and to cry out to God for mercy. In his heart he wanted to please God and to walk before Him in the beauty of holy living. The David Picture of the Church ANOINTED. On the Lord's behalf, Samuel anointed David as king in the presence of his brothers. From that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. That is a picture of the church that our dear Lord Jesus is building. The "David Church" will be_ marked by sporadic seasons of men feverishly seeking God until they experience the Spirit's power in their midst briefly, or occasionally. No. No! God purposes to have a people" who live in the power of the Holy Spirit every day of their lives. Is it not true that when men seek the power and anointing of the manifest presence of God, it is almost exclusively so that they can have great meetings, even with miracles happening in the meetings? We also frequently seek to experience the

power of God so that we can see people respond to God in the meetings, and then be added to the numbers of "our" church. God purposes a higher way than that! He will have a "David Church" where the glory of God is manifest in the church of believers living through each day and through every situation, in the enjoyment of His love, and obviously and continuously anointed by the Holy Spirit who controls and fills their lives. DEPENDENT. David looked to, trusted in and relied on God alone. He had faith in God to defeat a giant. (13) He did not link his faith with Saul's armour and dependence on his own wisdom and strength. He trusted God alone. In a leaders' gathering we heard a brother declare, from time to time in church history, people recognized that they had the capacity to affect their generation for God, and so they did. Even the course of nations has been changed by men who joined together to accomplish God's purposes." My understanding of church history gives an opposite perspective. It is when a person, or a people, have cried out to God because of a realization that only God could change a situation, and then have trusted Him to do so, that God has sovereignly intervened with glorious results. This measure of trust and dependence, un-tainted by any confidence in the flesh, will be a mark of (the David Church. MEEK. David walked in humility before God, never departing from an inner certainty that God is absolute sovereign, and that he was His undeserving servant. He retained a servant heart all of his days, and in that he glorified his Lord. Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord? What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD... How great you are O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears." (14) The full dimension of what is depicted in the thought of a "David Church" will only be realized in wonderful actuality when a whole people consistently walk in meekness, honouring their God in all of His majesty, and being gladly submissive to His least desire. Bring Back the Ark! David brought back the ark of God. It was the ark of the presence of God, the place where His glory shone forth. It was called by the name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who was enthroned there. With great joy and celebration, David brought back the ark and placed it in a tent. (15) There is a statement about the ark that is very significant for our day: "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent." James assured the assembly in Jerusalem that the way in which Gentiles were responding to the Gospel shared by men such as Peter and Barnabas was an effect of this rebuilding. (16) We are intended to be a "tent" location in which the King may reign, and through which He may manifest His glory. We are meant to be a people in and among whom the presence of God is not solely to be accepted by an act of faith, but which has become actual, awesome and glorious. Nothing less than the ark of God in our midst can be what God intends for His Church. When we experience[^] in frequent and full expression, the ark of the manifest presence of God among us, we will place no emphasis on grand buildings, or buildings of any kind. We will neither extol the presence of men with strong and capable leadership gifting nor bemoan the lack of expert worship leaders. Our focus will not be on such things as superior programmes, brilliant Bible teachers, our officialdom with its rules, nor even our achievements nor the measure of our recognition in the church world. All of these things, and much more, are but a sop and a Humanistic stopgap endeavouring to make up for the Church's greatest need which is depicted in the ark of God, which David brought back to Jerusalem. The urgent need for the reality of God's presence and glory should be our great desire, and our heart-cry to God. We need David to reign! David's anointing

Some people oppose and contend with the "head-and-shoulders" church, seeking its destruction. Saul took his own life: consider that! Let us set our hearts for David to reign and that will deal with Saul. Let us bring back the ark — into our lives, into our homes, and into ' the Church! Such is the church of my dreams.

The Heart of the Matter

Chapter 17

"If you are looking for a perfect church," folk used to say, "Don't join it if you do find one, because it then would no longer be perfect!" The church of my dreams is not made up of people who are perfect in every detail of thought and behaviour, but they do have hearts that have been touched and transformed by the Holy Spirit. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. "Heart first" is God's way with His people. He requires of us, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (1) When Paul longed for God to do a deeply effective work in the hearts of the Thessalonian believers he shared it with them: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (2) "Spirit" has the same meaning as the Biblical use of the word "heart," so that both of the above verses convey God's primary concern for His people to have transformed hearts. There is a line to a well-known song of praise to our "God of wisdom, and of power" that declares, "He can make a perfect heart." This is a key aspect of the "David Church." David was a man after God's own heart. God will have a people whose motivation, desires and affections are filled with light, and centred in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Surely it is in these realms that we are called to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. (3) In John Wesley's terms, they will be a people whose hearts are "fixed on God." When we are born into the wonderful family of God, we are born with an inner longing to be like Jesus. We sing many songs expressing our yearning to be transformed into the likeness of the Son of God. We are grieved when we are conscious of acting contrary to His nature and falling short of what pleases Him. The desire is God-given. It is given because God wants us to reach out for the very thing that He purposes for us. A very precious aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to bring about such changes within us that our hearts are perfect before God, that He is able to find pleasure in the attitudes and aspirations of our hearts. So, we see that God wants us to be so changed that we are like Jesus at the very core of our being. When we enter His family, we are born with an innate desire to be like Him. And to cap it all, the Holy Spirit is actively engaged in accomplishing this very thing. God's Provision for Yielded Hearts God does lovely things in the hearts of His followers who are totally yielded to Him. He fills us by divine provision so that we can actually live to the fullest dimensions of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Here are some of the precious gifts of grace that become ours as God is able to fill our hearts with himself: 1. PURITY. When the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to consider issues involved with Gentiles turning to Christ, Peter shared how they had responded to the Gospel: "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us." And in continuing reference to the Pentecostal experience of Cornelius and his household, he further stated, "He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith." (4) When we turn to the Lord Jesus with saving faith, a cleansing work takes place. The sin stains of years are washed away, and we are made a new creation. Peter said that an inner cleansing takes place when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We then experience a purifying of motivation and desire. Beyond that, John

told us that "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us [keeps on cleaning us; keeps on keeping us clean] from all sin." (5) What full provision for heart holiness! Isn't it marvellous to feel clean inside? We can have a perfect heart! 2. LOVE. "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." (6) "Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law." Love is all that God requires of us! Every other commandment is summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." (7) Love is the "family likeness," the one thing that should mark all of God's children. "Love comes from God.... whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (8) The fruit of the Holy Spirit—in us—is love! (9) He fills the heart with love, removing everything that is contrary to love. What provision for a love-filled life! We can have a perfect heart! 3. PEACE. What comfort and assurance the saints of centuries have found in Jesus' words to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (10) The world may give peace of a temporary, superficial and external nature, but not Jesus! He gives peace in the heart that flows like a river. In fact, He himself is our peace! (11) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (12) What amazing and deeply satisfying peace God places within the hearts of those who walk with Him. We can have a perfect heart! 4. GODLY DESIRE. Paul told us that God works within us, giving us both the desire and the capacity to act according to His good purpose. (13) Isn't that wonderful! We need not struggle to live up to impossible criteria, nor force ourselves unwillingly to meet lawful demands. God has written His laws on our hearts so that we can follow Him because we want to, with singleness of eye, singleness of purpose, and singleness of heart. We can have a perfect heart! 5. LIGHT. God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (14) In our heart God places light for understanding. We are given knowledge of the glory of God and understanding of His will for each step that we take. We need never stumble in the darkness of faulty human understanding, or tragic misunderstanding. God lights up our pathway! We can have a heart that is filled with light. We can have a perfect heart! "Guard Your Heart!" There are areas in which God calls us to guard our hearts. Although He makes ample provision for every aspect of our spiritual safety and wellbeing, we are given personal responsibility for the use to which we put our hearts. Behind this freedom of choice in affection, attitude and behaviour—without a doubt—is Father's desire that we freely and wholeheartedly choose to allow Him to be first in everything, reigning without rival in our hearts. GUARD YOUR HEART! "Above all," proclaims the wise man, "Guard your heart, / for it is the wellspring of life." (15) "Out of it flows the springs of life" is how the Amplified Bible puts it. The Living Bible says, "Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life." Your life depends on it, so guard your heart well! GIVE YOUR HEART! "My son, give me your heart/ and let your eyes keep to my ways." (16) What a call from God this is! "I want your heart. Give me your heart." We have no right to give our hearts—our desires, thoughts, and choices—to anyone or anything else! Yielded God-filled hearts are absolutely essential if the church of tomorrow is to eventualise. This is the basic element of the "David Church." LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. In this foremost of all commandments, which virtually takes away the need of any other, save to love our neighbours as ourselves, we can catch a glimpse of God's highest purpose in redemption. Nothing less will satisfy Him, and He has made us so that nothing less will fully satisfy us either. We were made for

God, and we were made for love, especially to satisfy the yearnings of His loving heart. "You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person does. Your real life is in heaven with Christ and God. And when Christ who is our real life comes back again, you will shine with him and share in all his glories." Let us store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. For where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. Some sing, "Nothing I desire compares with you," but surely, we should be singing, "All that I desire is found in you!" TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. This Proverb continues, "And lean not on your own understanding;/ in all your ways acknowledge Him, / and He will make your paths straight. / Do not be wise in your own eyes;/ fear the LORD and shun evil." (17) When our hearts are fixed on God in adoring and yielding love, and so are set on things above and not earth things, we will be enabled to walk a straight path in the will of God. That will be a foretaste of heaven, here and now. Doesn't this Scripture teach that leaning on human reason and understanding is telling God that we don't trust Him? Trusting God should be a continuing attitude every day of our lives. 64 SING AND MAKE MUSIC IN YOUR HEART TO THE LORD. Vocal melodies are lovely, but music in the heart is exceedingly precious to God. There is a continuing song of praise and adoring delight in the hearts of a lover church, whose eye is only for the beloved. His call for our hearts is a call for our love, and His call for our love should set us singing in our hearts, with joy and wonder at His amazing love. Beware of Absalom! Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. He stole them away from their allegiance to David, the king. He did it subtly and seditiously, so that neither David nor the men themselves knew what was happening. Over a period of four years Absalom quietly worked to win their hearts away. Finally, a message was brought to David: "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." (18) When Absalom had the hearts of the men of Israel, he had David's throne. David only reigned while he had first place in the hearts of the people. So, it is with Jesus and the Church. He reigns on the throne of our hearts' allegiance and love. Absalom's Guile Absalom made a show of splendour and wealth. He provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. He knew that men look on the outward appearance, perhaps especially the trappings of power. This kind of thing happens not only in the arena of worldly men, but among those who claim to follow Christ. We can be beguiled by a show of wealth, success and grandeur. This is what the high and lofty One says, He who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, / but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, / to revive the spirit of the lowly/ and to revive the heart of the contrite." (19) "The meek will inherit the land/ and enjoy great peace." (20) If we are to live within the circle of God's favour we will need to shun the alluring approaches of the Absaloms — outward show and fleeting splendour — preserving within us a meek and lowly heart that will delight and honour King Jesus. Absalom used deceitful talk, appealing to men's pity, and to their pride as well. Words of artificial praise and sympathy can be very convincing, and the arguments of those that use them can sometimes almost convince us that wrong is right because of our special circumstance. If the kingdom of God were based on words, there would be multitudes enjoying its pleasant fruits at this very moment, but actually still locked into the binding, blinding, crippling laws of humanistic religion. Men are using high-sounding phrases and correct terminology to proclaim their superior grasp of "Kingdom life." We dare not listen solely or primarily to men's words, but rather be very sensitive to the inner whispers of the Holy Spirit, who knows the hearts of men. Absalom extolled his own virtues, thereby undermining the merits of King David. By so doing he built a wall between the men of Israel and David. He made certain that it was him that they saw and heard, rather than the king. If Absalom lived today you can

be sure that he would have published an attractive magazine, with photographs of himself frequently displayed on the cover, and on inside pages as well. Since he couldn't produce a magazine or feature his name in large 65 print in newspaper advertising, he found what doubtless seemed to him to be a fitting method with similar intent. During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King's Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, "I have no son to carry on the memory of my name." He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day. (21) But Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. We must be very careful indeed that we follow no one who does not experientially exhibit a self-crucified life, clearly seeking to bring glory to Jesus alone. Whether it is an individual or a system, we can only please the Lord by our mutual association if complete selflessness is an obvious mark of our life. When we have a pure heart for God's glory we can only enjoy deep, edifying, God-glorifying fellowship when we identify with people of the same spirit. In the "David Church," the church of my dreams, no Absalom-like behaviour will be tolerated, because every believer will love God with all of his or her heart, and only be content as Jesus reigns within them and about them. The Lord Jesus Christ alone is worthy of praise and glory and has the sole right to reign in His Church.

Sailing into Tomorrow

Chapter 18

It was a fascinating and enjoyable picture. In my spirit the Holy Spirit was painting a picture of a little sailing boat in a small harbour. Circling more than a half of the harbour were high and quite rugged hills. Behind the hills, trees were swaying in a stiff breeze, but in the sheltered harbour very little of the wind was reaching the sails of the boat, which was slowly sailing around in the confines of the harbour. The scene appeared to be uneventful and pleasurable. I seemed to know that the yacht had been sailing these harbour waters many a time over past years, and that those on board knew every inch of the shoreline, and every vagary of the tide. Sail out through the 'heads,' and make for the open sea" I heard the call clearly enough but could not tell where it came from. It conveyed a tremendous challenge! It was a call to "move out into unknown "waters where they had not been before. There could be challenges out there beyond their capacity. They had no idea what current or gale or storm they might encounter if they moved out beyond the boundaries of their pre-set knowledge and experience. There are believers like that! They are far from satisfied or fulfilled where they are, but yet they are afraid and unwilling to move out from the sheltered place of their present experience, even though it may be humdrum and mediocre. The yacht moved out! Moving through the heads was traumatic. It was difficult not to turn back because of the trepidation those on board were feeling. But the boat made open waters. Away from the shelter of those encircling hills the yacht increased its speed as the wind freshened up. The sea swells increased as the boat sailed into the deep. It is high adventure to sail out into the unknown, beyond present experience or understanding, at the call of God. Feeling comfortable with what we know and fearing to move beyond what is normal among those with whom we associate, can sadly restrict what the Holy Spirit is willing to reveal to us and lead us into. We would be wiser to fear what we know, and to venture into the unknown at the call of God. If we were willing to leave the shelter of the harbour of our smallness we would begin to experience the amazing vastness of God's desires and provision for His people on earth today. As the boat moved further out and the weather seemed to be becoming too much for it, so that it was in danger of being overwhelmed, I observed that the vessel increased in size and capacity so that it could well face the challenges of the mighty ocean into which it was venturing. We can be very sure of this: As we respond to the call of God to move out into new waters, He" will super-naturally_ give us the spiritual capacity to triumph. Again, and again we will hear Him say to us, "My grace is enough for you." It is very precious to be able to testify, as Paul did, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' " (1) [emphasis added]. 67 Have you heard Him say that to you? He has spoken to me like that, time and again. You can be certain that He wants to say the same thing to you. Sailing in Zion "You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." (2) Yes, we have come to Mount Zion — the place where the King reigns, and where His people enjoy the delights of His presence and the blessing of His favour and care. "Look upon Zion," Isaiah exhorted us; he described it as a place where God is worshipped, a city

quiet and unmoved, (3) and as a place of broad rivers and streams. (4) Zion is a place for sailing boats! ZION IS NOT A PLACE FOR MIGHTY SHIPS. The church of my dreams gives no place to mighty vessels of men's construction ... There is no room for pride in Zion. Structures of men in church life, which display their human accomplishments, are an abomination to the Lord. God chooses the foolish, the weak, the lowly, and even the things that are not. This principle applies to individuals, but also to "ministries," gatherings and churches. "Why?" do you ask? He answers: "So that no one may boast before him." (5) If a person has a God-given desire to move out into the superb fullness of Father's purposes for His people in this present day, and a longing to experience what we have endeavoured to depict in this book, then they must abandon forever any part of the "Big Boat Syndrome" that is very popular today. ZION IS NOT A PLACE FOR ROWING BOATS. No galley with oars will ply those waters, Isaiah informed us. "Rowboat religion" is very popular, isn't it? It displays a confidence in human effort and ability. It is the "King Saul" church. In a rowing boat one only achieves according to one's own strength and ability. In a "rowboat church" the goal is to accomplish the best that man can do. Any activity is undertaken, and every effort is made to cause the church to grow and prosper. But man's best is sadly insufficient for this hour. We need heaven's best! Who would exchange the ark of God's manifest presence for a set of oars? Some do! Of course, it would appear to some to be advantageous to row the boat so that control of their ship, its direction and speed, is safely in their own hands. But you cannot row your way into the church of my dreams. The word "galley" conveys the thought of rows of slaves chained to their oars, and masters with whips striding a plank between the rows. Slaves who slackened their efforts or who drooped in exhaustion would feel the painful, bitter bite of the lash. Could that ever be a picture of some churches? Jesus sets captives free! ZION IS A PLACE FOR SAILING BOATS. It is a place for moving freely before the winds of God. In my vision it seemed very daunting to simply allow the yacht to be carried out into the ocean at the dictates of the wind. To take our hands off the control of direction, speed and goals of our lives may be very daunting, but it allows the wind of the Holy Spirit to carry us forward without hindrance or delay caused by any lack of faith or lack of yieldedness on our part. 68 The Danger of Drifting Isaiah said, "Your rigging hangs loose: the mast is not held secure, the sail is not spread." We are not called to be drifters! If we throw away the oars, as we certainly should, but do not raise our sails, we drift. We must pay careful attention to what we hear, so that we do not drift away. (6) If we drift, it will be back into yesterday's habits, sins, childishness, customs and bondage. Think about the dangers of drifting from: self-effort and on the counselling, teaching and controlling of men. 4. Spiritual freshness, true reality, wonder and joy, to the staleness, boredom, hypocrisy and 'taking for granted' that may have once marked our lives. 5. Variety, spontaneity and simplicity, to the routine and predictable patterns of tradition that never fully satisfy an earnest follower of Jesus Christ. When believers drift along, content with where they are, they tend to become master theoreticians, puffed up by knowledge rather than humbled by the glory of God that could be manifest among them. When believers drift along, they tend to settle for playing a role with which they are more concerned about the acceptance of others than by the approval of God. Jesus described the Pharisees as "Actors on the stage of life, playing a part which, you are not," which is Kenneth Wuest's translation of the word "hypocrite." When believers drift along, they tend to place more importance on impressive externals than on inner excellence. For example, some would do well to come to a place of quality family life rather than to strive for impressive church life. Sailing into Tomorrow Let us nail the sails to the mast! Let us raise every stitch of canvas and sail

out from the mountains of tradition and fear of man, to where we can be carried. 1. The priority of a love relationship with Jesus, into the programmes and activities of traditional Christianity. 2. Adventurously responding to the Holy Spirit, to the plodding predictability of church routines imposed by the systems of men. 3. Relying on the grace of God and the control of the Holy Spirit, in every aspect of life, to relying on on by the winds of heaven into the tomorrow of a glorious church. Let us reject any thought of selectively raising the sails of our vessel, either to appease our own timidity or satisfy the pressures of false, man-imposed obligations. Such things would delay and divert us from beginning now to enjoy the God-honouring blessings of the "David Church" where our hearts are wholly God's and where we are totally and irrevocably yielded to the Head of the Church. The Church of My Dreams In the church of my dreams I have glimpsed a new dimension, or a radical restoration of Calvary, which makes a tremendous difference to daily Christian living. This doubtlessly includes corporate as well as individual crucifixion. In the church of my dreams I have seen the revelation, the showing forth, of Jesus through the people of God, so that there is a clear manifestation of His glory, love and salvation to unregenerate mankind. 69 In the church of my dreams, I have been gripped by a sense of awe because of resurrections. Resurrection life now will become the experience of simple believers because of supernatural expressions of God's grace. In the church of my dreams I have learned that God purposes repeated, breath-taking, and breath-giving revelations of himself in, upon and among His people. This will be linked with a new norm of walking in revelations of the Holy Spirit. It will bring continuing reality, excellence and simplicity. It will result in life-pulsating, positive holiness. It will also lift the people of God to new and amazing dimensions of worship in which it will seem that heaven has come down to immerse us in the glory of God. In the church of my dreams Christians will enjoy the reality of staying "immersed" in God, so that consistency, overcoming, and overflowing life and love will mark young and old. In the church of my dreams there is religion-free living where saints are no longer weighted down by the burden of multiplied routine meetings. Rather the church will be noted for: quality brotherhood; unity in variety within pressure to conform; fulfilment in simplicity and steadfast integrity; selflessness in attitude, thought, behaviour and care of one another; home-based churches with geographical identity; believers living in freshness, fire and overflow; spiritual leaders with servant hearts; and by consistent living in the "sphere of the Spirit." In the church of my dreams wholehearted believers will have "an eye for God's glory, and a reliance on his grace." This will be a key to open up the path for them into enjoying heaven here and now. The exalted Lord in Zion will be the sure foundation for the time, and reverential fear of God will be a key to the treasure of His rich store of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. (7) In the church of my dreams a superb heart quality of servanthood, graciousness and gentleness will show itself in anointed, sensitive, inspired and inspiring hearing, caring and sharing. This will come from the truly self-empty, Christ-expressing, God-honouring and Spirit-led lives of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor teachers. They will have no heart for, nor will they tolerate, "office," "control," "territorial rights," or pre-eminence of any kind by men, wanting Jesus alone to be glorified. Effects and Consequences There will be many results of the "David Church" being established among men. These are some that! Father has shown me: 1. A sense of awe and wonder will repeatedly grip many because of the way in which God "uncovers" himself to and in His people. 2. Hungry hearts will be given open eyes. Response to the call and revelation of God will give new insights until the fitful light of the moon will become like the brightness of noonday, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days. (8) 70 3.

Naturalness, and even natural weakness, in befriending sinners and sharing Jesus with them, will have supernatural results. What starts like a trickle will not stay ankle-, knee- or thigh-deep, but will be as water deep enough to swim in. 4. Christians will consider deprivation, rejection, suffering and even martyrdom to be a joy and an honour because of their all-consuming love for God and desire for His glory. 5. Reality, righteousness and a God-fearing recognition of His supreme authority will be restored as norms in the Church. 6. Changes in governments and the course of nations will be caused by an honouring of God and an honouring of godly men. 7. There will be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (9) We will see His glory, and we will be His glory. 8. The government will be upon the shoulders of „ the Lord. And there will be no end to the increase of His government, and of peace. He will reign on1 David's throne. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this. (10) "Salvation belongs to our God, / who sits on the throne, / and to the Lamb." "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen! "(11)

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