

Purpose-Driven Churches (Part 1)

Why We Need to Be Aware of Them

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Much of this first sermon on the subject I am beginning is devoted to laying some foundational principles involved in an unusual religious phenomenon that we are living through here in the United States of America. Thus, it is going to take a while for me to get around to my main topic. Hopefully by the time we conclude the subject (which will not be today) all that I say here at the beginning though will make some sense.

I am not sure you are aware that in the last twenty or thirty years we witnessed the rise of religious fervor in the United States. That may seem surprising to you given the fact that it is also quite clear that immorality is also increasing at the same time. In fact, both have been increasing steadily for several decades. Now logic would seem to dictate that these two opposites would not happen at the same time. One would normally think that if interest in religion is rising, it seems more logical that immorality would be declining, or if immorality were increasing, then interest in religion would be declining; but this illogical situation is occurring. They are both increasing at the same time, and there is a logical reason.

The logical reason is as follows. I am going to put together a number of scriptures that will lay a foundation for this that is occurring.

Romans 2:12-15 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.)

Verses 13 through 15 are a long parenthetical statement that Paul inserted into the flow of his teaching in order to explain God's judgment of men more specifically.

John 1:6-9 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came for a witness to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that

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Light. That was the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world.

Did you notice the copious use of the term "Light"? Light is the spiritual symbol of that knowledge which reveals spiritual truth even as light does in the natural world. Light gives knowledge of what formally had been vague and indistinct, or not even known at all. Light removes ignorance, doubt, and confusion. We all know that Jesus was the focus of John's word. He is the spiritual and moral Light of the world.

There is another word of some importance to us in verse 9, where it says, "That was the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world." It is the word that is translated into the English "true." I was able to glean from *The Daily Bible Commentary* by William Barclay the following interesting information. He says that the Greek has two words that are related to each other, and unfortunately the *King James Version* translated both into the English word "true." However, there is a shade of difference between the two words, and that is one reason both words exist. The first one is *alethes*. The second is *alethinos*. Both are spelled the same except for the suffix *-thinos* in the second word.

Now *alethes* is used to designate that which is true as opposed to that which is false. *Alethinos* is used to designate that which is *real, true, authentic, or genuine*, as opposed to that which is a fake, or at least indistinct. In this case, John is saying that Jesus is the real deal. He is the authentic, genuine Light-bringer. We have to understand that others brought light, but Jesus is the *real* Light-bringer. Let us add another scripture to this.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [or suppress] the truth in unrighteousness.

I want you to notice that they *know* truth, but they suppress it. We are talking about real truth.

Romans 1:19-20 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [or to them]; for God has showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

We are going to begin to put these three scriptures together. God holds mankind without excuse. Mankind is responsible before God regarding a level of the knowledge of God by which a fairly strong measure of truth is known. Enough is known, but they deliberately suppress it. Therefore, Paul is saying that mankind is without excuse before God because not only is the fact of God as Creator clearly available, but even things apart from that. What is so obvious is that the creation demands a Creator. Those things which are apart from that—His eternal power and Godhead—have to do with His personal attributes and governance of His creation.

We are going to divide the phrase—"that which may be known of God"—into two areas: (1) that He indeed does exist, and (2) even some of His attributes and His governance of the creation is known.

You might remember the term "Godhead" which appears in verse 18. I went over this when I gave the "*The Father-Son Relationship*" series, that this term "Godhead" here is woefully mistranslated. It should read "divine nature"—that is, what He is like. I am going to go back and read Romans 1:20 again, and I am going to insert "divine nature" into it.

Romans 1:20 "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen [in other words, there is light available to them], being understood by the things that are made [that is, this light comes to them by means of the creation, so that they know a Creator exists], even his eternal power and *divine nature* [His attributes; what He is like]; so that they are without excuse."

These attributes include such things as His providence, His loving-kindness, His mercy, and the sheer thoughtful genius that He shows in designing everything.

Let us put all three of those scriptures together. The apostle Paul is teaching in Romans 2:11-13 that deep within every person on earth is a consciousness and an awareness of God, and with that a basic sense of what He requires. Brethren, that is evident to us. Every culture on earth worships a god regardless of what they call him or how they do that worshipping.

In addition, those cultures have established laws of behavior, many of which parallel God's, and so what Paul says in Romans 2:13-15 is confirmed by John the Baptist in John 1, as he shows that all men have light. What he is implying, even as Paul was, is knowledge of the true God. That knowledge may be indistinct and vague compared to what we have, but it is nonetheless light. That is why Paul added in Romans 1 that

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mankind is without excuse.

So Paul is explaining that God's judgment of men—even though unconverted—is fair, and He justly holds all of mankind responsible to the degree of the light revealed to them, judging that men should live up to the highest standard of their personal revelation of that light. That is pretty fair. They may not have light to the level given by Jesus, and they do not fear God as we must, but they do possess enough knowledge for God to hold every single person guilty. That awareness is what men have named our "conscience." That conscience acts as a moral regulator of what is right and wrong. Paul mentions that in Romans 2. The very fact that this basic conscience exists on a worldwide basis is evidence, regardless of the fact that they are unconverted, that God's judgment is just. "Conscience" means "a knowing within one's self."

I want you to turn to Proverbs 20:27 to what I think is an amazing scripture.

Proverbs 20:27 The spirit of man is the candle of the LOORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.

That is incredible when you think of how many people have lived and died on earth. Let me give you this scripture from *The Amplified Bible*. It is just a little bit clearer. "The spirit of man (that factor in human personality which proceeds immediately from God) is the lamp of the LOORD, searching all his innermost parts."

Brethren, what a mind! Do you think that He is only searching *our* hearts? He is searching the hearts of everybody! Is He busy, or what, keeping track of all of these things? I do not know how He does it. I only know what His Word says, and I believe it. Everybody has a spirit in man that gives man intelligence and the ability to gather knowledge and put it together, and reach conclusions. That spirit in man is the candle, or the lamp, or the source of light from God, and everybody has it, as we just saw in Romans 1 and John 1. Thus God ensures that all men have the basics of righteousness and evil. Man has a basic conscience to provide a guide. Conscience is, by definition, an internal imperative, or influence for one to do right.

I want you to note that this "spirit of man" mentioned in Proverbs 20:27 is not limited to converted people, but to everybody.

There is a catch in all of this, and that is that a conscience is subject to education, because most of one's conscience's concepts are merely the acceptance of social pressures within one's circle of companions, or wider still, one's community.

Let me show you something in Psalm 34:11 to confirm this. Recall that just a bit earlier I said for us it is required that we *fear God*, and that one of the reasons for this is to help this imperative—our conscience—to lead us in the right direction.

Psalm 34:11 Come, you children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

A conscience is subject to education from the environment in which one lives, and the most influential one is the one parents provide in one's home, but other factors such as church, school, workplace, and friendship experiences also impact so that the conscience is always in a state subject to changes. Our internal moral regulator is not a constant. This is one of the reasons why Proverbs 4:23 strongly urges us to guard our heart, "for out of it are the issues of life."

Always, though, whether converted or unconverted, there is a measure, whether so very small as to be of little influence, or very great so as to provide a strong barrier to sin, we have going for us the fear of God to bolster the conscience. Therefore, one of the things Paul is teaching, and John confirmed, is that this basic awareness of God is what He requires of every person. The catch is, it can be listened to, or it can be thoroughly stifled. This is why Paul can honestly say in Romans 1 that mankind is without excuse. Do you know why? They are stifling, they are suppressing, the basic knowledge that they do have.

If we were watching an American movie, or maybe a television program like "Law and Order," we would have to conclude that God has the goods on us to convict us, because God Himself ensures that this basic need—maybe I can even refer to it as an instinct—is in every person, and that every person has a measure of control over which way it grows, and is used to regulate his morality.

Please understand at this point that this is not a sermon on conscience. As I said before, I am laying some foundations here, and everything will begin to tie together hopefully as the sermon moves along. Not just this sermon, because there will be at least two or three in this series. This foundational evidence is for information that will be given later.

One more thing to add to this is that moral and spiritual deterioration to the conscience, and thus conduct, occurs when one does not live up to what one knows is right. The conscience begins to deteriorate. Conscience must be supported by behavior, or it drifts always downward. This is what is happening in the Western world, and especially in the

United States and Britain, which have received, unprecedented in world history, exposure to the truths of God's Word. No nation in all the history of mankind, from Adam and Eve on, has ever received such an exposure to God's Word as Britain and the United States. Most of Britain's came 50-100 years ago, and they were undoubtedly the leaders in the world in spreading the Word of God all over the world, but they have been supplanted by the United States and its ministries. Put together, the tribes of Joseph have less excuse before God than anybody who has ever lived, and so our fall is really going to be great.

People know that they have a need for a relationship with God, but at the same time we also have a nature that constantly urges us toward self-inward immorality. Thus there is always somewhat of a pull to go this way or that, and the tensions to go this way or that not only occur individually, but also occur culturally; thus, subtle changes occur in a culture as the number of people in it tilts this way or that in their perspective that regulates behavior.

This is what has been happening in these last several decades in the United States. People are not dumb. They understand. They know that the United States of America is plunging into a cesspool of immorality. On the other hand, they also know that what they believe is the Christian religion is being attacked and battered from every side. They know that is why many journalists are calling this period of time we live in, the "post-Christian era." To those journalists, Christianity is over. It is still alive, but it is not kicking anymore. It is just making weak moves to let everybody know that it is still alive, but just barely.

These same people—the Americans and British in general—have enough religious education to know that even what they *think* is Christianity is far and away the best religion existing on the face of the earth. So what do they do to protect even the vague relationship they have with God in an attempt to make it better?

Enter here, in the flow of my sermon, the phenomenon that is now occurring. Have you ever heard of what the journalists call the "emerging church"? They see something is happening. Maybe a bit more specific others may call it the "Purpose Driven Church," or "Outcome Based Religion," or "the New Paradigm Church." All of these monikers apply to the same religious movement. The movers and shakers of this religion do not call these churches by those names. This movement indeed does qualify as a church, and indeed it contains elements of Christianity, but this movement has indeed greatly redefined Christianity. It is very popular, and one of the reasons I am going into this is that it may have significant prophetic influence.

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We are now going to turn to a familiar scripture in the book of Proverbs, significant enough to appear twice in the book of Proverbs, but we are going to look at Proverbs 14:12. It also appears in Proverbs 16:25.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Notice the word "end." It is singular. There is one end. There are many ways to death, but only one end.

The truth expressed in this proverb is vital at this point. What is it that ultimately determines our attitudes and our conduct and the way we choose to perceive events and other people? Why is yet another major religious force rising in this country, further dividing an already seriously fractured religious condition? In one sense, this is a question that is full of complexities when we view the whole world scene.

When we look at one another worldwide, we seem so very different from one another. Language differences make this very obvious. Then there are racial, economic, political, religious, and educational differences, just to name a few of the obvious ones. It seems to matter not what the question or event is, or who or what the person is, or what the person's activities are that we are evaluating, we seem to manage to arrive at a multitude of opinions, or we might say conclusions, regarding the subject.

This fact is very evident in the political world. It does not matter what the issue is. Everybody has his own thoughts about the issue if they have done any thinking at all about it. The result of this is a world badly divided, with tensions, resentments and offenses, and fighting lying just below the surface or has already broken out. You know that this is true. Which way should we go? Which way should we follow? Whom should we follow? The world is not at one, is it? It is divided somewhere between 200 different nations, and who knows how many different ethnic groupings there are within each of those nations, and each ethnic grouping does not perceive things in a united way either.

The first time we visited Zambia, one of the men there, a native Zambian who has a Master's degree and is a very well educated man, told us that in Zambia there are 70 some different dialects spoken by those people in that small nation, which makes communication very difficult. They are all Zambians, and the language differences just highlight a reason why they have such difficulty communicating with one another. Do you know what the solution is? Everybody learns English and they communicate with one another in English, still retaining their separate identities with the dialects that they

speak, and so it produces a clannish system.

We are going to go now to Psalm 133:1-3. This is a beautiful Psalm.

Psalm 133:1-3 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

The overall subject of this psalm is the preciousness of unity. It hardly exists anywhere. It is precious because it is so pleasant, and it is precious because it is so rare. This psalm also hints gently at two truths: (1) unity is as available as dew, and (2) like dew, it is the gift of God. It is a gift. Why then do we not have unity? And, as regards to this sermon, why especially do we not have religious unity? The answer is actually very simple because, like everything else related to God, mankind is rejecting the gift. It is that simple. Does not Romans 1:18-20 show that? Men suppress it. They are rejecting it. That is the pattern. The whole world does that.

There is a basic knowledge of God. Not just that He exists, but even about His divine nature, and mankind is rejecting it. Mankind is splitting into thousands of different peoples and different ways because they reject what God so generously gives freely that would produce unity. This rejection can actually be understood, because the cause of disunity is the problem of sin. Do you understand what I am saying? Sin, evil, produces the fruit of disunity because light is rejected.

At the very foundation of these evil qualities of human nature—pride, fear, cruelty, lust, selfishness, the desire to dominate and control—is the rejection of the gift of God's Word and a relationship with Him. Like Adam and Eve, all choose death rather than God's Word. That is what Proverbs 14:12 tells us: "...the end thereof is the ways of death." The failure of man to believe and submit to God's Word, even at its most basic level, is why mankind is without excuse before God.

I want you to turn back to something that Richard used last week ["Why Many Do Not Understand"], but it fits right here. Matthew 13:15 is in the introduction to the parables. Jesus is quoting Isaiah. Isaiah saw this clearly back in his day. Here Jesus is repeating it in New Testament time. He says:

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Matthew 13:15 For this people's heart is grown gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes *they have closed*.

So rather than receive the light, mankind closes its eyes and rejects the light. Incidentally, we are going to lead up to this, and you can be thinking about it. God shows in Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve that they did exactly the same thing. These principles are so simple.

There is perhaps no area of life that disunity is more noticeable to Americans than in the world of religion. In regard to religion in the United States, we are somewhat unique among all nations. History tends to show that most nations have risen to great power, and at least partly they are driven by one or two dominating religious forces. In most cases it was the religion of the king that dominated, but in the United States there has never been a king. We have an elected President, and history again shows that in the United States people feel very free *not* to follow the President's religious choice.

It is a fact that much of the early settlement of the United States was motivated by people escaping the dominating religions in Europe in order to be free to worship according to one's individual conscience, and thus religion has always been exceedingly more important to the average American than most members of other nations, but it has produced the following:

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

America is occupied by over a thousand different religions, many of them calling themselves Christian, and yet each is somewhat different. Yes indeed, brethren, there is a way that seems right, and America exemplifies that proverb. What this does though for me, is that it sets up an oxymoronic situation in which a Creator of awesome intelligence, wisdom, love, creative genius and power is able to create a habitation for all the living beings He creates in His image, provides for them, and yet He does not seem to care how those He creates worship Him, or respond to each other. Everybody is free to follow their own whim.

We understand because we have knowledge of Him that proves this oxymoron is not a reality. He very greatly cares about how people perceive Him, because how they perceive Him can be of such great value to them. He cares because He loves them; thus He has provided a way of life by which those He created are to respond to Him and

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to each other. In other words, He did not leave us without knowledge. But if one only looks on the surface of all this huge variety of differing religions, it appears that however a person conceives his particular god, it is good enough.

Now what is the evidence for this conclusion? The overwhelming majority of people seems to believe that they are all worshiping the same god. There might be a thousand different visions of what they think God is, and what He is like. These thousand visions are not taken from the Word of God. The light is being rejected.

Is God fair in His judgment? Of course He is. Is the light available to mankind? It is, and even though God does not require perfect obedience from the unconverted, He does require an obedience that comes up to the standard that He has established for *them* to obey; not us—*them!* We are held to a much higher standard. "To whom much is given, from him much more is required." He does not require of the unconverted the obedience of a converted person—one who believes the light. So they all believe, but at the end of life they are going to reach the goal they have set for themselves, as long as they are faithful to what they personally believe.

Do you know what this does? If it is true, it creates a God of multiple personalities. He is a spiritual schizophrenic who has no particular goal in mind for man to accomplish. Therein, brethren, lies the problem. He *does* have a specific goal in mind that man is to come to, and He *does* have a specific way man is to be faithful to in order to arrive at *His* goal for them.

What is it that ultimately decides what we will think and do in relation to God? This was the question that began with Proverbs 14:12. As I said before, there might be many specifics that would impact on one's answer, but right at the beginning of God's revelation He cuts through all the falderal and nails it down for us:

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yes, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die: For God does know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her

husband with her; and he did eat.

The answer to my question has two parts to it. The answer is partly supplied by knowing God from things that are revealed in other parts of the Bible. Knowing God, we can understand that He did not just throw Adam and Eve into this confrontation unprepared for what they might face. God never treats anybody unfairly. He is never unjust in His operation. God had clearly communicated to them because they *knew* they were not to take and eat of the fruit of that one tree.

I am sure that the instruction God gave to them was more detailed than that. What we are seeing is just the bare bones of the issue because that is what Satan concentrated on—the tree. Eve knew, and so did Adam, that they were not to eat of that tree even though Satan had raised the issue. Therefore, the conclusion has to be that God had educated them to their responsibility. Even as Paul and John taught in the first century, mankind has a basic awareness. They know God exists, and they have an awareness of a difference between righteousness and evil. It may not be detailed, but the basics are there because they make laws in their culture that are very similar to God's. Maybe not all of them, but there is enough there to know that they know something.

Why, then, did Adam and Eve fail? The answer comes down to the second major factor, and this is a biggie: They did not really truly believe God. They were not convicted. They were not fully persuaded. They were not convinced within themselves that He really meant what He said. So we can see, that even though they were educated, they really did take Him for granted, and there was no fear of God to drive their conscience—not enough, anyway, to drive them in the right direction, and they made that fateful choice.

It is very interesting that Jesus touched ever so briefly on this. Adam and Eve are never mentioned, but I want you to turn to John 6:29. John 6 is a very important chapter. This is the chapter where He taught people for quite some length that He was the bread of life that came down from heaven, that people needed to eat of Him. But before He ever got to that portion of the chapter, He says in verse 27:

John 6:27-29 Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat [or food] which endures unto everlasting life which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him has God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that you *believe on him* whom he has sent.

Adam and Eve did not believe. They did not believe what they heard. They did not believe the knowledge that they had available from God Himself, their Creator. They were not persuaded; they were not convicted, and they made a bad choice. They did not have enough respect for Him to move in that direction. So Jesus, before all of these statements about Him being the bread of life and the light of the world, establishes first in these people's minds that the key ingredient is going to be whether or not they believe Him.

Let me tie something else to this that appears in Psalm 74:12 that says, "For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth." We can understand now that this is a statement that covers all of time, because God has assured that men will have enough knowledge, enough light about Him, that they should be able to make moral choices according to His law, at least to a basic level. God has made sure that this knowledge is available to all mankind, because He is working salvation. The salvation for them may not come until the Great White Throne Judgment, but nonetheless, God is going to come back with them and say, "Do you remember that you really did have knowledge of my truth? Why did you not follow it?"

What kind of responsibility do we bear, brethren? It is something to seriously consider unless we just fritter away our time and our life. The combination of true knowledge available about God from the creation, and the general availability of the written Word, gives God enough evidence to convict even the unconverted. The problem with man is his unwillingness to believe to the point of being convicted deeply enough to submit. This is why Isaiah and Jesus both said, "Their eyes they have closed."

So the answer to my original question is that our attitudes and conduct are determined by the education communicated to us, combined with what we choose to believe. In this particular instance, what Adam and Eve chose to believe *overruled* what they had been educated in. As Paul shows in Romans 5, that is the general path all mankind has trod.

I understand that what I have illustrated is a simplification of what could be a complex subject. Perhaps it might even be called an over-simplification, but at the same time, the overall truth of this principle does not require a degree in rocket science. The fact of the matter is that whatever truths God has revealed, especially to His own children, are straight-forward and easily understood. God has called the weak of the world, and yet even we can understand them. There is a saying that salvation is education. This is a generality, but it too is basically true. Education does not save one, but those who are going to be in God's kingdom are indeed going to be thoroughly educated in God's way.

Now, why are these things important to this sermon? Well, many of the sermons I have

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given since the Feast have been on the subject of how we become spiritually and morally educated in this world's ways. This, too, can be stated in a very simple but true way. The ruler of this world, along with his evil henchmen, has communicated to us their ways, mindset, perspective, worldview and attitudes spiritually through the course of this world. It is as though Satan has hijacked the entire educational system and steered everybody the wrong way.

Perhaps one of the saddest and most discouraging elements in this whole mess is that God, who never lies, gives enough information in this Book to show that even though mankind has occasional misgivings about the way things are in what we see and hear, mankind—every one of us—has nonetheless wanted Satan's way. "All have sinned and have come short of the glory of God."

The sum of this is that we would have done exactly as Adam and Eve did and what we continue to do. This is why we need a Savior. This mode of unbelieving, scoffing, thinking is what we need to be delivered from. Jesus said that what we need is for us to believe Him rather than the world. This is also why we need a new heart as a gift of grace from God, because the human heart is incurably sick. God calls it a heart of stone. Everything that is aimed at it of God's truth is bounced off. So He gives us a heart of flesh—one that is soft and yielding.

In the early parts of 2004, I was continuing through a series of sermons on Gnosticism ["Does Doctrine Really Matter?"]. It was Gnostic teaching that stole the name of Christ and strongly encouraged "no works" lawlessness, challenging the unity of the early church with such strength that it succeeded in virtually submerging the true church from view. Gnostic teaching was absolutely heretical in terms of biblical truth, but it was so popular with the public that over a couple of centuries *it* became the visible church while stealing the name "Christian" in the process.

Here is another consistent principle to help one evaluate what is presently happening in the United States. Romans 8:7 proclaims the truth that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The carnal mind is at war with God. This is how the enmity shows up.

With this natural bias against God as a backdrop to guide our thinking, when we observe something religious claiming to be from or representing God becoming popular with the public (like Gnosticism did), you can be virtually certain that it is not true, and that it is not from God. How can I say that so confidently? Turn to Luke 12, because once again the truth is simple:

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Luke 12:31-32 But rather seek you the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; [Jesus is speaking to the church.] for it is your Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom.

With that thought in mind, let us turn back to Matthew 7:13-14. Again, Jesus is the speaker.

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter you in at the strait [difficult] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and *many* there be which go in thereat [that is, at the broad easy gate or door]. Because strait [difficult] is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

Jesus' teaching is clear. The true church will never grow to be great either in numbers or in influence. This way of life is difficult, requiring a person to sacrifice his life for the sake of our Savior and His way of life. We must become living sacrifices, and therefore this way of life is unattractive to self-centered human nature.

Mr. Armstrong used to tell the story, actually laughing at himself, saying: "When Bill Graham goes into a town, he holds a revival, and every day the attendance goes up and the number of people who make altar calls goes up. But when Armstrong comes into town, everyday the attendance goes down because the truth is unacceptable to human nature, and people have an aversion to it [Romans 8:7]." They reject it because they begin to feel it pinching into their lives. Human nature does not want to become a living sacrifice. It has its limits. So the truth, the light of God, exposes them for what they are, and God can very fairly judge them.

In our day, a movement similar to Gnosticism—especially in terms of its explosive growth—is taking place. It is an emotionally attractive and feel-good religion very popular with the religious public, and it, too, calls itself "Christian." Some journalists researching this movement's roots say it goes back about fifty years.

But the theologians who research into this sort of thing, though they will accept it as a "Christian" religion, may call it by several more specific terms. Some researchers who write books about it call it "The New Paradigm Church." The word "paradigm" means "pattern"—the new pattern. Remember I said earlier that this religion is redefining Christianity. That is what Gnosticism did. They redefined Christianity, and they did it by changing the meaning of words into their vocabulary, their lexicons, but the redefining

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was not correct. Paradigm means pattern.

Some of you who were in the church back in the 80s and early 90s may remember Joe, Jr. using this term—"new paradigm"—as the Worldwide Church of God was breaking up. That new administration formed in the wake of Herbert Armstrong's death was influenced by people associated with this emerging church, and thus it has already played some role in affecting the true church. Others will name it "The Outcome-Based Religion."

Often the local community congregation will have the adjective "new" attached to the fuller name. For instance, "The New Life Community Church." That is a real designation of a number of churches scattered across the United States which have that name. There is an outcome based religion congregation here in Charlotte that has already outgrown its original anchor place, or its geographical location, in north Charlotte, so they opened up a new congregation in the south part of Charlotte. There is no designation on the sign that is out there that they are even a church. It is simply called "Park South." They are avoiding denominational identification like Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Episcopal. Those names are gradually disappearing from view.

So attractive and so popular are these organizations that it is not all uncommon for a single local congregation to have between five and twenty thousand members. It is this movement that builds those huge community mega churches after putting down roots. I recently read of one in Houston, Texas whose building occupies 750,000 square feet. I saw a picture of an interior. It looked very much like a basketball stadium. This article said that on any given weekend, its four services attract about forty thousand people. Fifteen years ago that group did not even exist.

Now compare this with what Jesus said in Luke 12 and in Matthew 7. Nowhere is there any indication whatsoever that the church Jesus Christ founded would ever grow in such a manner. Whether it is the Old Testament or the New Testament, the true followers of God are often referred to as "a remnant." Remnant indicates a small part. The many Jesus referred to will not become part of God's way until after Jesus' return. Those people converted then will not be part of the church. The church era ends with Christ's return, and a new judgment begins. Judgment is now upon the house of God, so when He returns, the church era is over, and a new judgment begins. When you see huge numbers flocking like they are into the new paradigm groups, you should know automatically something is wrong.

I think it best that I stop right here. It may seem rather abrupt, but I am going to smooth it off just a little bit. I am going to give a number of points we covered here so that we

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can summarize this because eventually all of these things are going to become important to the series. I am picking up biblical patterns in these points.

1): Mankind, though unconverted, is nonetheless guilty before God because there exists sufficient knowledge of God from the natural world that mankind is without excuse in its failure to live up to even basic morality. Adam and Eve did not live up to what God Himself taught them. All of mankind has followed that paradigm.

2): Unity cannot be achieved because of the problems of sin or evil within each person that drives all to seek their own way. Remember Jesus said of mankind in general, "They have closed their eyes." That indicates a consciousness.

3): Adam and Eve were not fully convinced, so they chose to believe and follow Satan even though they possessed knowledge that would cancel out Satan's arguments.

4): Jesus never claimed His church would grow large. Jesus knew what was going on. By contrast, the new paradigm churches are popular and are huge.

I have three more points, but I never got to them in the sermon. God willing, we will get to those the next time.