

Limpy
The Lost Way of the Word
Revisited

Darell B. Dyal

April 2005

July 2024

FOREWORD

Limpy, the Lost Way of the Bible, started as a note to our pastor about certain church practices. As I labored to frame my thoughts, a two-page letter became a book; a few days turned into ten years; and innocent concerns exposed sinister conspiracies. By the time I grasped the magnitude of the problem, I'd written a hundred and twenty thousand tightly packed words, Bible verses, and arguments—an impenetrable behemoth.

Trying to make such monstrosity readable, I pondered for weeks. Then the solution came in the shower one evening: "Why not use characters?" To me, who'd never even considered writing a book, using complex personas was totally outside the sphere of my thoughts. But to my amazement characters emerged, took a life of their own, told their story, and while they were at it, moderated wearying arguments.

Even more, their lives transcended theology, became the story within the story, and stood as lights on a hill embodying true Christianity.

It was the beauty of those lives that—after almost twenty years—compelled me to revisit *Limpy* to illuminate the characters and share the wealth of Christian love not normally seen outside the intimacy of private homes. And in this revisit, using twenty-five years of writing experience, I truncate debates and leave only enough theology to establish the integrity and knowledge of the characters, for they were, in fact, men of God singularly in pursuit of good for their churches.

And so, here is their story again.

* * * * *

Special Note: Some readers prefer to have a Glossary of Characters.
If you do, you will find such Glossary on the last page of the book.

* * * * *

Now to the original forward.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign in Jerusalem. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, walking in the ways of his forefather David...*and there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.* In the eighteenth year of his reign the book of the law was found. When he heard its words, he rent his clothes for he understood *the wrath of the Lord is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book.*

And as was written so it happened to God's own people. Imagine!

Still today, as in the days of Josiah, the Word of God is forsaken. Many, claiming God's anointing, disobey the Bible most of the time, substitute practices of their own, betray a sacred trust to nurture God's children, and compel them—disillusioned and unfilled—to drift away, wondering if they themselves are at fault. *Limpy* says, "No! You correctly discern and reject a manmade religion, whose advocates risk a shocking rebuke from Jesus: woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."

Limpy exposes this lawlessness. It calls to God's bruised, yet beloved, children, *Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.* The minstrel's voice wafts across a parched land,

*Come home, come home
Ye who are weary, come home.
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling
Calling, O children, come home.*

Limpy cries out, 'Listen to your spirit; hear the Shepherd!'

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Come home. He is life eternal!

Man's religion is an abomination to God! One day terrifying words shall resound, ***I never knew you: depart from me, ye that practice lawlessness.*** And that is the curse of the Lukewarm Laodicean church which the Lord Jesus will vomit out very soon.

Part 1—Background

I belonged to a lively church. Excitement permeated the place. There were new buildings, TV ministry, college training, choir, orchestra, choreographed services; even the mayor and local newspaper applauded. Attendance exploded under the lead of the charismatic pastor. It seemed that God's blessing was on him and his work, and that our church was on the right path.

Yet, all was not as it seemed.

The pastor, buried in pomp, did not understand that the church forsook the Bible and substituted a religion of its own, one that quenched the Spirit and had but powerless religious entertainment. This, he wouldn't, or couldn't, hear. And that is what the book is about. It is the story of religion fashioned and conducted by men; one that sounds good and seems right yet violates the very Scriptures it claims to obey. And that makes it incredibly, dreadfully wrong.

You'll see what I mean.

I liked the guy, and he, me, I think, but a barrier kept him from discussing these concerns. You see, according to *their* convention (I'll define who *they* are), he was the pastor and therefore, my superior. I was just a *layman*, and he, a *Senior Pastor* of an emerging mega-church. Yet, he was doing what he'd been taught; what he thought was right; and he was doing it with much approval. His was one of the fastest growing churches in our state. It held all tithe records, and who knows, may have been destined to be one of the largest in the denomination. Certainly he was destined to become one of *their* top guys.

I'd tell you the denomination, the pastor's name, to whom he reported, etc., if it made any difference. But it doesn't. The problem is bigger than one church or denomination. It spans Protestant and Catholic traditions exactly as foretold in the Bible 2,000 years ago. Man's religious works, even though hated by Jesus (you will see, He hates them) have become cherished customs. Within them, in spite of His warning, many forsake God's Word, choose a religion that will last only as long as the vapor of this life, and risk the rejection prophesied long before.

This allegation is from the Bible itself, whose arguments are set forth by an old pastor, Mishpat, 'Mick', a young Theologian, Didasko, 'Diko', and a layman, David, 'Limpy'. The setting for much of the story is a meeting called by Mick to discuss Limpy's concerns. The men are shocked to discover how far the church has drifted from truth, and to see that it practices a religion formed by man, not God. They struggle to define the error and awaken the church they love.

Along the way, the characters take a life of their own. They live and die in faith, in the manner of Biblical Christianity. Their lives testify of the way and love of the God who seeks, saves, and abides with those who tremble at, obey and walk in His word.

Limpy

Things were looking up. The congregation was over two thousand now. It would be a big year. The sacrifice of time and money was worth it. Senior Pastor Nicholas ‘Nico’ Laos had been right: expanding the facilities and going with TV brought the people. The Board knew they were blessed to have such a man of God as their leader, and to share in his vision for the church.

This story is about one of them, a man called Limpy. He’d walked, or rather, limped, among them for years, mostly unnoticed. He was a slender fellow, just shy of six feet, with traces of gray in his rather thick, brown hair worn to medium length. His face was thin. He had beautifully even, white teeth; but rarely smiled. To look into his steady gray eyes was to see the pain of his arthritic hip. Yet, he avoided medication, preferring a clear mind. He never spoke of the constant ache.

His name was Layman Lameman. Pastor knew him, shook his hand almost every service and told him it was good to see him. One day, Limpy fancied, the pastor might come to his home, and they could discuss the Word. Limpy loved the Scriptures and wanted to talk about some things they said. But Pastor had been to seminary, had degrees, and was ordained. He accepted church traditions as if biblical truths, and, after all, he should know, right?

So Limpy focused on his CPA business and studied the Bible as he had for many years. Sometimes he cried when he read its stories. Its people were real to him. He knew every name and account by heart. In fact, he knew more about the Word than anybody imagined, but no one would have ever known if it hadn’t been for a dream. He dreamed God sent him to teach His Word. That changed everything. It made a different man out of Limpy.

Here’s what happened.

Before the Council

Pastor Laos (no one used ‘Nico’ anymore; he now preferred, ‘Pastor’), comfortably in command of church matters, sat down and said, “Please be seated. Thank you for being at this important meeting. But, before we talk about our new expansion, we’ve a short interruption.” He was a large, imposing man with dark hair and a square, strong chin. His brown eyes flashed sternly (for such a kindly man) at Limpy, who quietly returned his gaze and waited.

Pastor continued, “You all know Limpy. He’s been one of us for many years. But he’s developed an attitude, which I’m sure he’ll correct, with our help. Two weeks ago, when I

cancelled his class, he asked to discuss my decision with this council.” Pastor’s voice betrayed his annoyance.

He resumed, “Remember, about a year ago Limpy surprised us saying God had told him to teach. Sister Sureknows wanted a break, and since we didn’t have anybody in mind, I said, ‘Why not?’ so Limpy took the class. The initial feedback was positive. He seemed concerned for people. I felt pretty good about what I heard, thinking, of course, that he was using the Sunday School Quarterly as source material. It didn’t occur to me that he might be trying to use the Bible itself.”

“Then I began to hear that he was teaching about some pretty deep things. This got my attention, and, upon investigation, I discovered it referred to matters like Prayer and Fasting; the Purpose and Biblical Structure for the Church; Discipleship; Women Teaching Men; and other complex subjects. I became concerned, because he didn’t seem to be teaching the church’s position, but rather, what he himself thought. Finally, some of what Limpy—an untrained layman—was teaching was reported to conflict with what I’d said. And that was it; I canceled his class.”

“What bothers me most,” and Pastor stood abruptly, towering over them, “is to think that anyone would teach something different than what I’ve taught.” Pastor glared at Limpy and said, “No one will teach other than church doctrine—and nobody will correct me!” None of the Council looked him in the eye, and, sensing his point was made, he finished in softer tones, “For the Bible is clear: everybody is to submit to those in authority over them in the Lord. You understand that don’t you, Limpy?” His voice was now conciliatory. “You know I’m God’s shepherd for this flock. You shouldn’t disagree with me. You don’t have a problem with that, do you?”

Pastor, certainly a man among men and the leader of his people, folded his arms in triumph and looked down at the slender man sitting before him.

No one spoke. Limpy would have been willing to apologize, but he didn’t know what to say. From his position at the corner of the table he just looked around at the Council members; but no one met his eyes.

At that moment, Pastor’s secretary, entered and said, “Dr. Laos, Dr. Metano is on line 2.”

As he left the room Pastor said, “Gentlemen, take a fifteen-minute break.”

Relief flooded the room. The tension had been high. For diversion some of the Council began to speculate on the nature of the call from Dr. Metano, the National Overseer. Whatever it was, they were all proud their beloved pastor was so well connected with the top of the denomination. They began to drift from the room; but no one approached Limpy. Finally, he limped down to the pond behind the church and sat on a bench, head in hands. He didn’t know what to do.

What Happened at the Pond

And then Limpy heard a voice he'd heard before, "Why are you here, My son?"

Limpy whispered, "Lord, You sent me to teach; and so I have. Yet Pastor Laos is upset and has turned against me."

The Lord said, "Do not fear, for My Spirit shall come upon you and it shall be given you what you are to say. Do you believe Me?"

"Lord, I believe."

"Because you do, this day I give you a double blessing. Your name shall no longer be Limpy, but it shall be David. For David's heart was also tender before me and he too was faithful; My Spirit shall come upon you as upon David. You shall stand against the giants in the church. I shall bless your end more than your beginning."

And David bowed in God's holy presence.

Before the Council, Again

"Let's get back to work." Yet, sensing their curiosity and knowing the call furthered his image, Laos said with feigned modesty, "Dr. Metano invited me up there for dinner tomorrow. Said he wants to pick my brain. Maybe I'll get his support for the new sanctuary while I'm at it. That'd be worth the trip, huh?" Everybody laughed and felt good about being on the inside; everyone but David. He was still thinking about what happened at the pond and what must now follow.

"Where were we? Ah," he chuckled looking at Limpy, "Limpy was about to speak."

David slowly stood. For a moment he was silent; but, as he started he sensed the Lord's presence. They were amazed when he said, "My name is David. The Lord has put His Spirit upon me to teach His Word to those with ears to hear. Judge for yourselves what I say."

His voice was reasoned, "Jesus wants us to celebrate life caring for one another. He gave His Spirit to guide us into all truth and the Bible to govern our lives. We must learn, obey and teach it to others. But after years of study, it is clear to me that we've fashioned a religion more of our own making than God's. I'm not a theologian but our efforts seem to have resulted in an anemic church overrun by the cares of the world. This is very different from the power and love of the Church described in the Bible."

Pastor Laos, surprised by Limpy's logic, listened impatiently.

David continued, "This must not continue. Religion cannot be by man's standard. *Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded*

them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. They performed religion their own way and it did not please God. He wasn't happy then; He's not happy now. Jesus was clear when He said, *If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words...* He clearly warned that those who practiced lawlessness would be commanded to depart from Him. Jesus set forth life and death: life for those who keep His Word; death and separation from Him for those who don't."

Laos interjected, "Limpy, we know those verses. What are you saying? Surely you don't accuse us of practicing religion our own way?" He scoffed. "You know we love and preach the Bible around here. Get your thoughts together and tell us in five minutes what you're trying to say? We've some very important business to attend to, and we're going to run out of time if you don't hurry up." He looked intolerantly at Limpy.

David continued, "God is calling out a family to be with Him forever. The Lord wants His children to walk in love, considering others more important than themselves. In that spirit, the church can be one with Father and Son. His command is that we love one another as He loves us. He empowers us to succeed by sending His Spirit to be in us. Many passages give us examples or commands to be full of His Spirit, and in that glorious Spirit, to work His works.

His cascading words surprised everyone, "God's plan and provision are perfect. They provide, in the Holy Spirit, power to overcome sin, the world and the flesh; they integrate fellowship, fruits, gifts, armor and prayer. The only thing that can hinder the growth of the body of Christ from building itself up in love is the meddling of man, as agitated by the devil. That, I think, is what's happening in our church. What I think we should do is sit together and consider...."

Pastor could take no more. He torpedoed David's sentence, "Limpy, you were a good member! I'm going to tolerate you tonight, but you better go home and think about what you're saying. We will hear you one more time, but we won't stand for you to accuse us of the work we do; nor tolerate the destruction of our church. **I'M WARNING YOU!**"

With that he opened the door and David limped out. As the door closed he heard, as if on purpose, "I tell you, that man is going to cause trouble."

Dr. Metano

"Brothers, this meeting is called to order," Pastor Laos said as he burst into the room with a robust, gray haired, heavy set, distinguished looking man. "I thank you all for being here. A lot of exciting things have happened since we met last week. You remember that Dr. Metano, here with us this morning," and he turned and extended a welcome gesture to Mishpat 'Mick' Metano, who smiled warmly and nodded, but didn't speak, "asked me to visit him last week. He's so intrigued with our plans that he decided to drop by and discuss them in person."

Obviously interested in moving to the architect's sketches, Pastor continued quickly as he looked around the table for the first time. "I was telling Mick how we planned to build..." but he froze when he saw Limpy sitting at the corner of the table. Somehow, the surprise and importance of Metano's visit had caused Pastor to forget he'd scheduled Limpy's final hearing as the first item. His first thought was to reschedule Limpy, but then decided it would be good for Metano to see how skillfully he handled church problems.

So he cleared his throat and said, "But before we start, one item carried over from the last meeting." Turning so he could see Dr. Metano, who was seated by Laos' place at the head of the table, he said, "Pastor Metano, you've chaired many sessions where the men in the church took time to discuss problems. That's what we're doing. Our brother, Layman Lameman, down there at the end of the table," Dr. Metano leaned forward, his deep blue eyes studying each man until, finally, David waved a hand, "had a concern, and, with my permission, brought the problem to this Council." Dr. Metano nodded in approval, and Pastor continued, "It seems that Limpy, 'that's his nick name'," he said as an aside to Metano, "thinks we're compromising the faith. He's been teaching contrary to church doctrine and is here to clarify his position. But before I turn the floor over to him I want to explain, for Limpy and the rest of us, the purpose of our denominational structure. It's great to have you here, Mick." And he finished with, "I invite you to jump in any time you choose."

Pastor, on Denominations

"We share in the legacy of God's modern-day revivals. In them, many believed, were freed from sin, healed of sicknesses, and filled with God's love. Revivals sometimes lasted for years. But following every move of God, men emerged to distort the Gospel and disrupt churches. Leaders saw a need for Bible colleges where preachers could be taught sound doctrine and sent back to the churches to stand against heresy.

"A pattern followed every revival of this modern era: believers, reacting to the need for pure doctrine, for growth and for extended fellowship, sought to meet those needs by forming denominations centered on their understanding of the proper way to worship and serve God. And so did we. Of course," he chuckled, "we got it right." Everybody laughed. "We know the Bible is God's Holy Word, and that it governs our individual and corporate lives. In fact, one of our safeguards is just that. We carefully control preaching from our pulpits. Our policy is that no one is authorized to preach in our churches without a license from the denomination. This assures integrity of doctrine. Another protection is that our headquarters assigns a senior pastor for each church, with approval of the local congregation. The pastor is then in charge of that church and answers to the denomination. He interfaces in the local congregation with the various ministry groups, but he is in charge. After all, someone has to be, right? Otherwise, imagine the confusion." They chuckled. With that, Pastor turned to Dr. Metano, winked and said, "Pastor, do you have anything to add?"

Dr. Metano, without standing, said, "Thank you, Brother. That's fine. I've nothing to say except to point out that God's interest is the local churches, not the denomination, per se. It exists only to serve those blessed congregations." With that, he was silent.

Pastor, still standing, turned to David and said, “Limpy, in the light of what’s been said, tell us what’s on your mind. Be brief. We have much to do.” He sat down, and all eyes turned to David.

David’s Discourse

David stood. He’d prayed a lot since the last meeting, and as he began he sensed the Spirit’s presence, and in that anointing said, “God warned that obedience is mandatory. Nadab and Abihu lost the priesthood and their lives for disobedience; likewise, Saul forfeited his kingdom. Jesus said doing His Father’s will was the way to please Him.”

“I said that God’s purpose is for the Body of Christ is to grow up in Him in love. To accomplish this, the Scriptures say *as many as received him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God*. That power is the Holy Spirit, through whom *God is at work in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure*, which is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. It is His intention that we walk in the Spirit, considering others more important than ourselves. To those who do this and overcome the distractions of life, Jesus said *I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*.”

“What could be more glorious?”

“**Limpy**,” Pastor blurted, but noticing that Dr. Metano sat, chin on hands, engrossed in David’s speech, he said, “Limpy, we know these things. Get to the point.”

Dr. Metano looked at Pastor and back to David, who continued, “The point is that we have everything we need: commission, commandments and empowering. Nothing is lacking. We should accomplish His purposes. Yet, when it should be healthy and strong, the church is sick and weak,” and now David spoke even more deliberately, “because, I think, just like Nadab and Abihu, the denomination does things its own way. God told us what to do and how to do it; yet we ignore His Word and have our own religion. In so doing, we are betraying God’s people to the enemy.”

Unable to control himself, even though Metano was there, Laos yelled, “**Limpy, I told you not to accuse my work. If you can’t make a positive contribution to this meeting and show respect for those over you in the Lord, I am going to send you home for the last time!**”

The two men stood frozen. Laos glared at Limpy.

It was Dr. Metano who intervened. “Brothers,” he said in a gentle, yet firm voice, “Sit down, both of you. Please, sit down.” As they did, Mick continued, “There’s no sin in having differences of opinion. In Acts 15 (the controversy over circumcision of the Gentiles) there was much debate, and knowing those Jews, and men in general,” and he chuckled, “there may have been some yelling. I fancy the debate raged for hours, or maybe, days, until one

by one every man had his say and then settled himself before the Lord. While we should seek unity, it is not a sin to disagree. Only two mistakes can be made: the first is to withdraw and separate; the second is to not let a man have his say. We ought to be mature enough to avoid both errors. I suggest we take a break, and then let David finish. Is that okay, Pastor?”

There was approval in the room, and they gladly got up to stretch their legs.

Laos wasn't happy. He was mad about Limpy's persistence in spite of being warned; he was upset that Metano would meddle; and he was perturbed to be forced (for now) to cover his feelings. He knew Limpy was going to cause trouble. He could feel it. He left abruptly with the excuse that he needed to check on a phone call. Actually, he needed time to think. He did not like the way this was unfolding. He wanted control and he wanted to shut the little man's big mouth.

With a concerned look, Mick watched Pastor Laos leave the room. Except for that, he was having a great time. He enjoyed mixing with people. In fact, he wondered how he ever let himself get talked into denominational politics. His love was for God's children. He walked by, patted David on the shoulder and said, “Good word. Keep it up.” Mick joined a group of men and was soon telling a story about the mission field.

It was good to have Dr. Metano around.

Reconvened

The break was good for Laos. He devised a plan that let Metano save face yet returned control to himself. He cleared his throat. “Gentlemen, Mick is right. Limpy must continue. I propose that he take another ten minutes. If he finishes, fine. If not, he can stop for the night, and we'll finish him in a special meeting.” There was more to the expression, *finish him*, than poor wording. Pastor didn't want Metano there. He would deal with Limpy when the time was right. He continued, “Limpy should be able to finish, because after all, good sermons can be preached in ten minutes. Besides, we have more pressing matters to address. How's that?” and Pastor turned to the national director.

Metano winced to see that Laos considered a building project more important than unity. He hoped that wasn't what the pastor meant; surely it was syntax, because he knew, or thought he knew, Laos' heart. Had he realized how much more David had to say, or that Pastor had devised a ruthless plan, he would have challenged on the spot, for he was not afraid of conflict. But he knew neither. He thought David might finish; after all, a lot can be said in ten minutes. Nor did he suspect what would happen at that next meeting; else he would have been there himself.

Mick smiled and said, “Let's do it.” He turned to David and said, “Proceed, Brother.”

David's Discourse, Continued

“Obedience is better than *sacrifice*. Yet the church is weakened by practices that are disobedient and self-serving. Its disposition is backwards. Instead of a determination to walk in the Spirit and comply with every command of God—biased continually to refine its doctrine as it matures—the church does just the opposite. If something feels good, sounds good, promises reward or satisfies cultural trends, or pleases some contingent, it is accepted. If it fills pews, it is taken as good. There are errors in doctrine, structure and practice. I will identify several that should be expunged with vigor and unity, not winked at or defended. Yet I’ll show you instances where direct Biblical commands are ignored; cases where men’s opinions are erroneously preached as if they are the Word of God; and examples where preferences of men supplant a more Godly way. These things ought not be.”

He paused and said, “However, before proceeding, one thing should be clarified. When I asked to meet with the Council, I hoped that the group would examine these things together. I know my perceptions may be incomplete or erroneous. If they are, I seek correction; if they aren’t, we need to change, don’t we? But these are complicated and sensitive matters. They require discussion and prayer, and that takes time. This cannot be rushed. I didn’t realize I’d be compelled to finish in such haste. I doubt that I can.”

He took a breath and said, “I fear that we are guilty of picking-and-choosing what we will obey. I’ll give you a few examples, and think you, yourselves, can name others. The point is, in this we are no different from Nadab and Abihu and risk the same judgment as they.”

Laos lurched to the edge of his chair, but just managed to clasp a hand over his mouth before he swore at Limpy.

David hardly noticed. “Let me give you an example. In it I think you will be able to see that the heart of the matter is the answer to a single question,

Does the church accept Jesus as Lord, and His Word as authority and direction for its structure and life; or does it not?

If it does, it will gladly, continually seek to more clearly understand the Bible so that it might become increasingly obedient, for Jesus Himself said obedience proves love. If it doesn’t, it will, in rebellion and disobedience, pick-and-choose as it wishes. The test is in the matter of the heart.”

“The first example is the matter of church oversight. We have serious error in church rulership. I hope it is just due to ignorance, for if not, can it be anything but heinous rebellion? I’ll show you what I mean, but first, let me be very clear: my comments apply to mature, established churches, not to infant churches just being birthed. For even in New Testament (NT) days it took time for the church to mature and elders to emerge. Therefore, in the early stages of the life of a new church, of necessity, teaching and oversight are provided by the

founder(s). But as the church matures, as part of its fundamental responsibility to please the Lord by understanding and obeying the Scriptures, it should seek to develop and recognize elders.”

The Council waited quietly, so David continued, “But, I am talking about our mature churches, for in them the Bible clearly mandates plural leadership. Every church should be earnestly moving in that direction. Instead, and what bothers me so much, is that we have a man-made tradition that blatantly ignores the Bible and practices a tradition that could infamously be called the *Rule-of-one*.”

Laos exploded, **“Are you saying I am disobedient; that the entire denomination is? That we are like Nadab and Abihu? Is that what you’re saying? If it is, you can...”**

Metano grabbed Laos’ arm, “Doctor, David didn’t say that. We agreed to hear him. He has a heavy heart. Let him finish. If he’s wrong, we’ll correct him, which, after all, is what he asked us to do.”

Laos stiffly leaned back in his chair, glaring at Limpy, whose endless words infuriated him.

David continued, “The Lord left 12 apostles, not just one. And, as the church matured, its ruling body expanded to include elders. So it is throughout the NT. This continued as Gentiles were added to the body of Christ. Plural elders were ordained in every church for oversight; rule (not as lording over the flock, but as examples); teaching (laboring in word and doctrine); prayer; protection; shepherding; feeding.”

David pleaded, “Aren’t these simple words easy to understand? If true for early churches, what has changed? If it was God’s way then, why is it not God’s way now? The fact is that nowhere does the NT command or approve the rule-of-one in a mature assembly. Why then do we practice it in all our churches?”

David stared at the council. “Is it not either ignorance or rebellion? Aren’t we like Nadab and Abihu? We must not quench the Spirit, but that can only be avoided by holiness, and holiness by obedience. It’s not possible to obey the commands of Jesus and ignore a plural form of local government. The question is simple,

‘Will we obey God’s Word on all matters, including structure, or will we continue as a law unto ourselves, risking the awful rebuke of Matthew 7?’

With that, David paused.

A Response

During Limpy’s discourse Laos planned his strategy. He had decided to let Limpy reach his first stopping point, even if it was more than ten minutes. Then he’d break in, and according to the ground rules, postpone the hearing until another time. There he would deal with

Limpy, swiftly, finally. But that big mouth had really agitated Pastor. Imagine the arrogance of anybody, *especially a layman*, not only to challenge him, but the entire denomination. His insolence had simplified Laos' task. It would be easy to put him out as a heretical malcontent. This made him smile. He said, "Time's up. Limpy's speech shows how little he understands. We'll reconvene to finish him later. For now, we're out of time. So, on behalf of the Council and Dr. Metano," and Laos turned to David, "Good day." He got up and opened the door.

The Council looked drained. As David limped toward the door Dr. Metano stepped in his path, gave him a bear hug and softly spoke in his ear, "Thank you, David. I'll be in touch. We must finish this. You need to come spend a few days with me."

Pastor held the door open but didn't look at David or say anything else.

Half way through the door he stopped and turned, "I'd barely started. There are vital issues that must be addressed. Search your hearts and see if it's not true." Then he turned and went out.

After he left, Laos talked about the new buildings, but the group was subdued, impacted by the arrogant little man. Pastor knew he was going to have to move quickly or Limpy would cause real dissension. He was determined not to let that happen.

Next

A few days later David received two very different calls. The first was from an enthusiastic Mick Metano who said, “David, I’ve been so excited I can’t sleep. I’ve been working to redefine our practices for some time, and you seem to have similar concerns. You must be my guest for a few days. I’ve canceled all my appointments for the rest of the week. A ticket is waiting for you at the airport for the 8:00 PM flight tonight. I’ll pick you up when you arrive. You’ll stay with Mercy and me and we’ll work in my study. David, you must come, else you’ll break an old man’s heart.”

He was so insistent that David could only promise to be on the flight.

David was a CPA. He worked out of home and kept a flexible schedule. Still, he wondered how he could interface with someone like Dr. Metano. But he had to obey God. The rest was in the Lord’s hands. He’d been sent to teach and teach he would. If that meant visit headquarters, so be it.

He packed and waited until time to leave for the airport.

But the phone rang again. It was Pastor. He said, “Limpy I’ve met with the Council all afternoon about you. We need to see you right now.”

Coldness in his voice alarmed David, who said, “I can be there soon, but I only have a few minutes. I’m...” but he thought better... “going out of town for a few days. I leave tonight.”

Obviously aggravated, Pastor said, “Our meeting won’t take long.” He could hardly wait to finish this thing. Laos was uneasy. This was contrary to the image he wanted. He liked to be known as a bold, yet approachable leader. He had labored for the good of the church and his own interests. He wouldn’t tolerate snags now. He was in the final stages of his plan to build a new sanctuary and then to move up to headquarters, where, his friends said, he should lead the denomination. He wanted no problems, and Limpy was a threat. Even the Council, which he held in absolute control, was divided about Limpy. It had taken all his influence to gain support for his decision.

David’s stomach churned. It would be bad. On the way he thought about Isaiah 53, *He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.* If the Lord suffered

in silence, David wouldn't protest. If it was necessary to crush the Innocent One, how dare he complain? As he turned in to church, he prayed, "Thy will be done."

It was a somber room. Most of the Council looked at the table or the wall. Only a couple of the men looked at him.

Pastor broke the silence. "Limpy, you've caused much grief. We like, we love you, but you've become a burden. Before you started to teach against our beliefs you should've met with us. We would have helped you. But you avoided us and started teaching. We gave you a Sunday school class and you exploited our trust and undermined my authority and our doctrines. Not only did you do that, but you did it at the very time we need unity to launch the expansion phase."

"You've forced us to act. You're out of our church. If, in the future, you are willing to recant and repent before this group, we will reevaluate your right to membership. Until then, we forbid you to attend our meetings or come on our property." With that he opened the door to David. There were no handshakes.

Had David not been preoccupied with the pain of the Suffering Messiah, he might have broken. Even so, he was numb. He began to think of the people in the church. He'd miss them. He was melancholy as he cranked the car. Then he started to think about their arrogance. How could they turn him out without discussion? It was unfair! They were wrong. Besides, he'd contributed a lot of money to that church. He wondered if he could sue them to recover the many thousands of dollars he had, naively, placed in their trust. How dare they kick him out? There must be some recourse.

A stern reminder cut through his thoughts: *...forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive those who trespass against us*. There was no alternative. He said, "Lord, I forgive them." He thought about it again and got mad for a moment. But he knew the Word meant what it said: he'd be forgiven in the same way as he forgave others. Above all, he feared God. So, by the time he got to the airport, it was behind him; and finding a place to park and catching a plane diverted his attention. On the aircraft he leaned back and closed his eyes. *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful*. Things were changing fast. He wondered how it would go with Dr. Metano. Whatever, it was well with his soul.

Metano's Hospitality

The flight was quiet and uncrowded. He dozed much of the way and was glad to be on the ground. In a couple of minutes he had his handbag and was slipping through the groggy passengers. He spotted Dr. Metano across the mostly empty waiting room and limped toward him.

Mishpat Metano hurried over to David and said, "Welcome." He gave him a hug and turned with a beaming smile to the woman at his side. "Darling, this is David Lameman; David, this

is God's gracious gift, my lovely wife, Mercy."

Mercy took his hand warmly and smiled in the same charming way as her husband. "David, I'm so pleased to meet you. I've heard nothing but good about Mick's last trip."

He said, "Thank you, Mercy, but, you shouldn't have come out so late for me."

"Oh," said Mick, "we like to do things together."

"And besides," she chimed in, "I haven't seen Mishpat," (she often called his real name when they were alone) "so excited in a long time. I had to come welcome you myself." When they got to the car, Mercy insisted that David ride up front.

Their warmth touched David. Mick said, "David, I noticed you called me 'Dr. Metano' back there. Please call me, Mick. That's what my friends do, and that is what I prefer. Will you?"

David wanted to say "Yes," but Mick was the National Overseer. He managed to chuckle and say, "How about, Brother Metano?" Everybody laughed. "Well," Mick said, "that's a good Scriptural term; but still, I insist. Let me tell you why. A long time ago, huh, Darling," and he turned to see Mercy, "we were just married. I'd completed my studies. Mercy was a nurse, with an MS in counseling. We felt we were God's answer to man's problems. Our first church was small and rural. There the Lord taught us two lessons that, bless His Name, we've never had to repeat. The first was for me, and the second, for us. They fashioned our ministry from then 'til now."

"I remember how hard I worked on that first sermon. I even practiced the message on Mercy, something I haven't done since. I wanted the people to see how hard we'd prepared to serve them, how much we wanted to help. They were kind enough after that first sermon, but I'll never forget the plaque I found on the lectern the next Sunday. It said,

Sir, we would see Jesus.

I'd come to teach them, but they taught me. I've never, in forty-five years since, preached but my prayer has been, 'Father, may Your children see Your Son, not me.' From then 'til now, as a reminder that neither reputation nor degrees qualify a man to speak for God, I use my nickname. Please, call me, Mick."

His humility captivated David. Mick continued, "And there was another lesson. Why don't you tell the story, Darling?"

"Okay, Honey, if you wish."

As she began, Mercy's voice softened with the memory. "We were still getting settled in the parsonage. I was to stay home to help with the church, at least for a while. Then later, if it

made sense, I'd look for a job. It was a Saturday morning. It seems like yesterday. Mick had walked across the field to the church to make sure everything was ready for Sunday. I was alone when a farmer roared up in an old pickup and stopped in a cloud of dust. He left the truck running and ran to the porch. I didn't see his wife at first. She was behind him and carried a child in her arms."

"He knocked on the door and said, 'This here the preacher's house?'"

"I said it was. He asked, 'Is he home?' I told him Mick was over at the church and asked if I could help. He said, 'This here's business for the preacher man.' He turned to go. When he did I saw his wife. Her hair was matted from sweat and her eyes were puffy. She looked like she'd been crying a lot. Then I studied the child. She was small, maybe four years old. Her head rested lifelessly against her mother's neck. She seemed exhausted; her little body worn by the ravages of fever."

"I rushed to her and took the child in my arms. 'I'm a nurse,' I exclaimed. 'How long has she been like this?' I laid her on the sofa and hurried into the bedroom for a cover. 'She's had fever four days now,' the mother said. 'First we thought it'd pass. By the third day we knew there was trouble. We grabbed Sally to head for the hospital. But Paul's truck wouldn't start, it wouldn't start,' the Mother started crying again. 'We don't have a phone. We were stuck. Sally was so sick, and hot. Paul worked all night on the truck, and I sat by my baby. Finally he got it going this morning. We're on the way to the hospital, but we turned in here for prayers. We are scared. Something is bad wrong with her. She almost doesn't move,' and she cried again."

"By this time Mick got to the house. He'd seen the truck drive up, sensed there was trouble and came running. He had burst into the room and listened to the end of the story. The child was burning up. I put a cool towel on her head and asked, 'Has she had anything to drink?'"

"Yes, a little. But she just lays there."

"I went for water and Mick rushed to the phone and called the hospital. The doctor wasn't in, but, they said they would reach him, that we should bring her immediately."

"We laid hands on that baby and cried out for the Lord to touch her. Those were not polite little prayers. We were desperate. We pled the wondrous blood of Jesus and begged for mercy and compassion. We had seen healings in the church in our youth, but now it was up to us. The shock of that burden hit us that day like a hammer. We were responsible for the anointing and for knowledge and for faith. The mantle had fallen on us, and we felt like children under its load."

"We took our car. Mick raced the twenty-five miles to the hospital. The women were in the back. Sally lay with her head on her Mother's lap. We prayed as we drove. Oh how we prayed. Our hearts cried out for that child; and before we got to the hospital peace had settled over

us all. God had moved. We knew it. Sally's temperature broke in the car. We could feel God's presence. We burst into thanksgiving as we pulled into the emergency entrance. She was dehydrated and stayed in the hospital for a day, but she bounced back quickly. She was okay!"

"Neither our faith nor our spiritual readiness had 'prayed down' God's blessing that day. In fact, as we talked late into the night, we realized it was God's mercy that spared her. He inspired faith in her parents and moved because of it. We were humbled to our boots; and we were changed."

"My did he preach the next day. I can't remember all his sermons, but I remember that one. His text was Isaiah 50, and she quoted the passage from memory, *The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakens morning by morning, he wakens mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?"*

"God's Spirit came upon Mishpat in a fuller way," she said as she looked lovingly at her husband. "He's never been the same. The church was challenged to seek the Lord. We wanted more than ever to share in His service and suffering. And best of all, Paul and Susan Springer came to church the next Sunday and gave themselves to the God who saved their beloved daughter. They became faithful workers; and little Sally is still a wonderful vocalist who blesses all who hear her sing the Wondrous Story of Jesus and His Love."

David listened, almost without breathing, as she finished.

"Thank you, Darling. You told that so well that it was as if we relived it just now. And I renew again my resolve to walk faithfully before such a wonderful Lord."

She leaned forward and put her hand gently on his shoulder. She said no more, but Mick knew that had they been alone she would have said, "I love you, My Husband," so he said out loud, "And I love you, My Wife." She smiled a private smile, and content in their love, leaned back in the seat.

Mick said, "Well we talked ourselves home. We live on the other side of that hill you can just see through the moonlight." They wound around the last curves and pulled up the steep drive into the garage. "Welcome, David. Let's see if there are any embers left in the fire and compare notes for tomorrow." They made their way through the kitchen and into a comfortable family room. "Mick sat David's bag by the door. I'll show you to your room in a

few minutes.”

He poked the fire and Mercy said, “Care for coffee or, maybe a cup of hot cider?”

“Cider sounds great to me, Dear, how about you, David?” He had to admit it sounded good.

“Two ciders coming right up,” she said as she turned to leave the room.

“Honey, aren’t you going to have some?”

“I thought you guys might want to be alone for a while.”

“Nonsense. There’ll be plenty of time for theology. Come make the room a better place.”

She laughed and went to get the cider. By the time she returned Mick had a warm fire. They sat and he said, “David, we’ve done all the talking. Of course, I remember that you are a man of few words. It only took ten minutes to set the stage for what you wanted to say last time.” They chuckled. “Let’s have a word of prayer, then tell us what’s happened since I saw you last.” Then he prayed, “Father, thank you for making us part of your family and for the love we share in Jesus. Thank you for David’s safe journey and for these next days we’ll spend together. We ask for your blessing and guidance. May we hear Your voice. Thank you for these refreshments, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

David hardly knew where to begin. Actually, he had been so busy that he’d not thought through the impact of being put out of the church. “I thank you for your trouble and hospitality. Actually, a shocking thing happened before I left. I received a call from Pastor right after you called Dr., er, Mick. He said he’d met with the Council all afternoon and that they wanted to see me right away. When I got there, he said I was a troublemaker and a burden to the church; that my teachings were in error. He told me they’d decided to put me out effective immediately and that I was not to go to any meetings or even on the property—unless I would recant before the Council.”

The Metanos started. “David, that’s awful,” said Mick. “How do they think they can do that? Did they give you a chance to finish? Did they let you speak at all?”

“No, Mick. Pastor Laos did all the talking.”

“David, that must hurt,” said Mick. “You’ve many friends in that fellowship, don’t you?”

“I was shocked. But the Lord softened the blow. I was thinking about the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. His pain put my problem in perspective. Yet, I was upset for a while, but the Lord has me on a short leash on several things, and bitterness and unforgiveness are close to the top. I, who have many problems of my own, dare not harbor unforgiveness. So I’ve forgiven them.”

They were silent, three mature believers reflecting on the majesty of the Word of God.

“Sing us a song, Darling. Let’s celebrate the glory of our God, and then we ought to get to bed. I’m going to wear Brother David out tomorrow.”

She smiled at Mick, went to the piano, played an old chorus, and began to sing in her full, alto voice,

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

“Sing with me, Brothers,” and they sang the chorus several times. In fact, they sang old hymns and choruses for an hour or more. They shared love in Christ as boundless as the One who pours out His Spirit without measure is boundless. Finally, Mick said, “Bless the Lord O my soul. Amen and Amen.” Then he said, “Let’s go to bed, darling. David, let me show you to your room.” The men walked out as Mercy picked up the dishes, still singing in her heart. How she loved Mishpat. What a great man he was. She’d enjoyed every day they’d shared, now almost fifty years.

Posturing for the Discussions

Smells of coffee and bacon filled the kitchen and even David’s room as he was dressing. He could hardly wait to join the Metanos downstairs. This was going to be an interesting day. He went down and said, “Hi, Mercy. How are you today? Boy it smells good in here.”

“Morning, David. I’m terrific, thank you. Want some coffee?”

“Sounds great. Where’s Mick?”

“Unless I miss my guess, he’ll be coming through that door any minute. He takes a prayer walk every morning and gets back at 7:30, hungry as a bear.” She was right. The stocky man burst through the door and literally danced across the kitchen singing “Good morning, everybody.” He gave Mercy a big kiss, said, “Morning, David” and “What’s for breakfast?” and opened lids on the stove all at the same time.

“Morning, Mick,” said David.

Mick found a simmering pot of grits on one front burner and a skillet of scrambled eggs Mercy was just finishing on the other. There was sausage and bacon on a platter under a grease-stained paper towel on the back of the stove, and in the oven, smelling wonderful, were browning biscuits Mercy would be served with honey and berry jams common to those mountains.

Breakfast was delightful. They ate a lot but finished quickly. The day would be busy. Mercy was driving down to the valley to pick up daughter Rebecca to go visit granddaughter, Sarah, who was carrying the first great grandchild. It was exciting! At last report, the baby was kicking Sarah as much as Sarah did her mother. They were having fun with Sarah's term. The last time they visited, they had sat around laughing, watching the little one push and kick and prepare to come out to serve his God.

Mercy said, "Why don't you guys get started? After I clean up the kitchen I'll bring you a fresh pot of coffee before I head out. Think you can make it for a couple of days by yourselves?"

Mick said, "We can make it. Just be back here to cook breakfast, right, David?"

"Absolutely." They all laughed.

"David, you may want to get your briefcase and head to the study. I'm going to load Mercy's car and help her get on the road." He pointed to a room that butted up against the family room fireplace.

David was in the study when Mercy brought the coffee. She put the pot on Mick's warmer. He stood, setting up his laptop at the table. "Thanks for everything, Mercy. I hope you enjoy your visit. I'm not sure if I'll be here when you return, but it has been a pleasure to meet you." Her kindness was ointment to David.

"Thanks for coming, David. I know what you and Mick are doing is very important. May God bless you as you labor for Him." They shook hands and she left the room.

David did not see her again, but Mick came in after a few minutes and said, "Well she's gone, and I miss her already. Hey, wha'cha got there?"

"I'm sort of a computer nut. Use it with my clients, either on line with their accounting systems, or sometimes, in their offices. This laptop is more powerful than most desktop PCs. But that's not the only reason I brought it. It has some powerful Bible software I use all the time. Maybe I can show it to you before I leave."

"I'd like that, but I don't know much about computers. Let's have some coffee, and I'll tell you how I think we should proceed." He poured coffee and sat down with David at the small conference table. This was Mick's favorite room. It served as a study and a library. Books were on shelves along the wall behind his desk, which faced the fireplace. It had plenty of room for a table and four chairs in the corner between the door and the fireplace. He used it when he needed to spread out or when he had meetings with guests like David. A window centered in the wall opposite the doorway, to the right of Mick's desk. You could look through it down into the valley. Two stuffed chairs were in front of the window. They faced into the room toward the fireplace but could be swiveled to look out. A flip chart stood in the corner

between Mick's desk and the door. He used it to keep notes and sketch ideas. Mercy teased him about the study. Said if he were a bachelor he'd stay in it all the time.

Mick Opens His Heart

"David, I've had a heavy burden my whole life, especially the last five years as Overseer. I'd like to tell you about it if you don't mind. I think it will sort of set the stage for our discussion anyway."

"I would be honored."

So Mick told this story, "It begins with my name, Mishpat Metano. You see, my dear old parents were believers. Even when he was young, my father was quite a scholar, especially of the Old Scriptures. He knew the Prophets, and that God often told them what to name their children, and that those names foretold things God was to do. My Papa call me, Mishpat, which is Hebrew for *judged* or *judgment*. He felt I would be a messenger for God, and that mine would be a heavy word. When you add our family name, Metano, the picture is even clearer. It was actually anglicized when my parents went through customs. The real name is Metanoeo, which means *repent* in Greek. Thus, my father believed my message was *repent* or *judgment*, and so he prayed for me until his death."

David felt a strange sense of eternity as he listened.

Mick finished with, "Mick was just a nickname that was easier for my classmates. It sort of stuck, except when I was home with my parents."

David didn't know what to say, so he waited in silence.

"Further, I'd like to tell you why I think our meeting wasn't accidental. But first, let's pray." They bowed and Mick prayed, "Father, we ask You to guide our discussion. We want to hear clearly. We ask You to help us hear You in this matter, in Jesus' Name, amen."

He continued, "I'm delighted to serve as pastor or missionary. God's work on earth is preaching the Gospel unto salvation of the lost; helping them grow unto full stature, conformed to the image of Jesus. That growth takes place in the Church, which is the Body of Christ, for which He shall return one day soon."

"I was glad to hear you say the same thing, for the church is drifting away from that Gospel. When I pastored, I was able to head off bad doctrine and teach the full counsel of God's Word. I thought up here, I might be able to correct errors on a broader scale. That's why I accepted the assignment when the brothers came to me. But I've discovered how deep the enemy's inroads are and how difficult that task really is. I've struggled with how to attack the problem, for there are many innocent ones for whom He bled and died who blindly heed whatever they hear from men they love and trust. I don't want to split the denomination; yet the more I push the more I discover that many don't want to draw closer to the Lord. They

want religion their way. I don't know if they'll change..." His voice trailed off.

"That's sad, and scary, Mick."

"I hear you. While I struggled with what to do, God sent me to hear you, a layman, say the same things. Yet, I never heard of you. Tell me, what is your background?"

"You'd have never heard of me if it hadn't been for a dream.

I dreamed I was on the plain of Shinar. As I watched my mind was opened and I understood the vision before me. It was noisy. A multitude clamored to espouse their many doctrines. In the head pavilion was Mother Religion, mistress of cults and denominations, prostrate before her master, Satan himself. A ruthless being, he was exhilarated by her worship, and pleased by events. An impotent church, governed by Pride and Flesh (which he controlled with ease) spread out around him. A Fog of Deception covered the camp. It was hard to see. His legions infiltrated the tents of the saints and gathered at their campfires. His arsenal was sharp and well plied. Passions were fanned by cunning whisperings of Pleasure, Power, Fear, Anger, Complacency and Sin. A weakened church reveled in its fleshly ways, even as it languished in disobedience and ignorance.

Religious fervor reigned in the camp. The multitude was weaving and chanting and planning good. The whole denomination used the same doctrine and the same words and the same songs. It came about that they found a city in a state and set up headquarters there. And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make rules and print them quickly.' And they used pen and ink and wrote their rules. And they said, 'Come, let us define an organization whose headquarters will govern the church worldwide. Let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the earth, and our properties others take.' And they said, 'Quick, let us train pastors and disperse them abroad and put them in charge, each with his own church, which he might rule in single point authority. And let each pastor have his own staff, with power to hire and fire.' And it was so.

They saw the work of their flesh, and thought them to be very good. All this they did for God. And the serpent sneered.

The Lord came down to see the organization the sons of men had made. And the Lord said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same doctrine. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing that they purpose to do will be impossible for them. They will buy land and build costly buildings and bigger organizations and pay higher salaries—and starve My Gospel. Come, let Us send a teacher that they may understand My Word and hear what

the Spirit says to the churches, lest I remove their candlestick from its place’.

So the Lord summoned me from where I watched. I found myself prostrate before Him. He breathed His Spirit into me and commanded me to teach His Word, to call them to walk in the Spirit, obey the Bible and test every practice by the Word.

“I awoke, and it was a dream.”

“Until then, I was a mouse in the church. I’d studied the Word for many years but hesitated to voice my opinion. Besides, what the leaders wanted from me—and I’m ashamed to say I gave to them—was my attendance, support for their programs, obedience, and money. As years went by, it became clear to me that much they practiced was, at best, traditions of men. But after the dream, I asked to teach Sunday school. God opened a door and I started. It went well for a while. Then Pastor canceled the class, saying I was in error. In the past, had he said that I would have accepted it as God’s will. But this time I was confused. I knew that the Lord had sent me to teach, and the pastor couldn’t be totally right. Therefore, I asked to discuss the matter with the Council.”

“You know the rest of the story. In the first meeting, Pastor Laos was very upset. But just before I had to respond, his secretary told him there was a call from you. He adjourned the Council for a few minutes. Nobody talked to me, so I went down to the lake behind the church. There the Lord spoke to me. He promised if I’d open my mouth He would fill it, and, because I believed, He changed my name from *Limpy* to *David*, as in ‘the man after God’s own heart’.”

“On that word I went back to the meeting and, to the surprise of all, including myself, spoke boldly about His Word. Pastor was startled and offended. He scheduled another meeting because there was other business, and he could see that it was going to take me time to finish. Then you happened to be down for the next hearing.”

“Some story,” Mick said. “I am more confident than ever that our meeting was not an accident. Let me tell you a couple of things that I didn’t realize until now. But they show the Lord is orchestrating this and is concerned about what happens. Before I called Pastor Laos that day, my secretary and I had been trying to finish an important letter. We were having trouble, and I was in a stitch to get it done. I had several calls to make, one being to Laos, but he was not my top priority. However, the Lord pressed me to stop **right then** and call. At first I thought it was just me, but there was such urgency that I made the call. I wasn’t sure until now that I had heard the Lord, but obviously it gave Him time to rescue you. What a God we serve; how exciting to be in His will.”

“And there was another *coincidence*. It was my trip itself. I never travel impulsively. I always call to clear schedules, etc., but that time I felt like the Lord told me to catch the next plane. I assumed it had to do with the building project. But I went, and here we sit, all because of

His providence.”

“So,” he continued, “let’s press on. We’ll start with your concerns and build from there.”

“Fine,” said David, “I have notes and stuff in my briefcase, and a lot of material on my laptop. I’m here to help, but one thing I’d like to say first: the Word says *and by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.* That should simplify our task. We just need to examine the Scriptures to discover what they say, contrast our practices with that counsel, and modify our behavior as necessary.”

“Trust me, David, it’s not that simple. Your position is, if you will pardon me, naive. It will be very difficult. I have trouble believing it, even after living with it for five years.”

“I don’t understand, Mick. Maybe I’m too abrupt; but this is not a game. We’re talking about eternal matters, and God is not pleased. The church had better wake up.”

Professor Didasko ‘Diko’ Gramma

“Amen, Brother,” said Mick, “Nonetheless, we have a difficult job. By the way, I’ve asked Didasko Gramma (he goes by ‘Diko’) to join us. I hope that’s okay. He is a young theologian and professor (Greek Studies) here in the Bible College. He has a good heart and a solid grasp of the Greek. Besides, he is quite a thinker. I’m sure he’ll contribute to our discussion.”

“That fine, I guess. I’ve never met a real theologian. I’ll probably be uncomfortable, but if I’m wrong, I want to be corrected.” But David wasn’t excited. He wasn’t much for talk. He liked to say what needed to be said, make decisions, and get on with it.

Mick was persistent, “Let me ask him. Campus and headquarters are nearby.”

“All right,” said David, hesitantly.

Mick picked up the phone and invited Dr. Gramma to come.

“Meanwhile, tell me the bases for your concerns and how you framed your theology.”

“Not much, just that I’ve read the Word many years for my own instruction. Much of my understanding comes from prayer and private study, not other books or TV. But as my knowledge crystallized I became concerned about variances between the Bible and what we practiced. My comments are driven by those discrepancies.”

“Do you see a lot of problems, David?”

“More than you’d hope, Mick, but...” David stopped.

“But what, David,” asked Mick?

“Mick, all I wanted to do was request an examination. I wanted to participate, at least until I made my comments, but it wasn’t my intention to do more than help start the process. I’m no theologian, and I am a poor and abrupt speaker. Besides, I think the problem is bigger than any of us. Yet...” and he stopped again.

“Yet what, David?”

“This is serious. The reason I’ve been in this denomination all these years is that it says it believes and teaches the Bible. Yet, I now see serious error. As far as I can tell, it disobeys the Scriptures with no Biblical justification at all. The *big preachers* may fool the people, and they may fool each other, but they don’t fool God; they may please each other, but they don’t please Him. What I don’t understand, is how they can just ignore the Bible...” And here both men fell silent.

Finally Mick said, “As I told you, I share your concern. I’ve been fretting about this for some time. But it’s interesting to me that you, just a...” and this time it was Mick who trailed off. He was going to say, *layman*, even though he knew it wasn’t a Biblical term.

Then he spoke again. “Why don’t we wait until Diko gets here so he’s part of the discussion? In the meantime, take a minute and show me that fancy computer of yours. By that time he should be here. What do you call that thing?”

David enjoyed his PC, professionally and personally as a power user. His skill gave him an edge with his clients. Most of them lacked computer expertise. They appreciated that he knew so much about information management. He would sit in their offices and do trade-off analyses of capital investment alternatives for tax benefits, and other financial evaluations—and display the results in stunning graphics. He saved them money and earned his own.

He said, “I’d like to show you some Bible software I use. It’s great stuff. I have several different translations of the Bible and can see them simultaneously. There are also two concordances, two Bible handbooks and an Atlas.” He clicked a couple of icons, and in seconds two windows were open on the screen. “Here’s how it works. Take, for example, John 15, the great teaching about *abiding in Christ*. Say we want to review the Greek word for *abide*. We click here to select the book, hold down this arrow until John comes up, and then use this arrow to get to the right chapter and this one to get the exact verse. Then we click okay, and bingo.” The text opened on the screen.

“Remember, we’re checking *abide*, so we click on it here in verse 4, and the Greek is highlighted in the concordance and the definition and other information about usage shows up in the small window. We see that the Greek word is *meno*, a primary verb that means to

stay (in a given place, state, relation) and that its *Strong's Concordance* reference number is G3306. Isn't that cool?"

"That is something. I can see that I need to get me a PC."

"There's more. We knew where we wanted to look. Often you can't remember where a verse is; or maybe you want to look at all the appearances of a particular word. Just select this search icon, spell out what you are looking for in this field, select whether you want the search to include the entire Bible or the OT or the NT. For example, let's search for *abide* in the NT. Type, *abide*, click okay, and presto! This search window tells us the word is used 20 times in 16 verses; and gives us the verses. If you want to view a verse in context, you move the cursor to it and click the view button. Bam! If you want to see the next one, or the one before, you click either of these buttons. That's not all. If you wanted, you could print the entire list of 20 verses, or any one of them, either on your printer or to a letter in your word processor. This gives you...."

The doorbell rang. "That's probably Diko. Let me get him in here to see this," and Mick hurried out of the room. David followed, more slowly.

Mick and Diko were exchanging a friendly hug and handshake when David limped in. Mick said, "Diko, let me introduce you to my new friend, David Lameman; David, this is Didasko Gramma, friend and professor." The two men shook hands. David estimated that Diko was maybe 35. He was tall and thin, with clear, hazel eyes.

"I'm pleased to meet you, David," Diko said in a resonant southern drawl. He smiled in a friendly way. "Mick told me you were coming. Seems we have a common interest. I, too, love the Bible."

"Hello," said David. He felt better. Diko wasn't as imposing as he feared.

Mick jumped in, "Diko, you've got to see some software David has on his computer."

They walked to the study and looked at the laptop. Diko was enthusiastic, and later admitted he used similar software. Finally, Mick said, "That's great. I am going to have to get one of these."

They laughed and Mick continued. "Let me tell you how I think we should proceed."

They sat down at the conference table.

PART 2 – THE MATTER AT HAND

Setting the Stage

Mick said, “I have, at one time or another, taken you both into my confidence. David, in recent years Diko and I have become real friends. Before that, his dad and I preached and prayed together for many years before the Lord called Sam home. I bounced Diko on my knee when he was a little rug rat. Then he grew up, mastered Greek (we were all proud) and has taught at the college for about ten years. I’d look him up when business brought me to headquarters; but, since I moved up here, Diko and I have seen each other often. He has a sweet wife and two little children that I think of as my own.”

Diko laughed. “They love to ride the bouncy horse the same way I did. They call Mick ‘Grampa’ and we wouldn’t have it any other way. When Dad died (Mom preceded him) Mick and Mercy sort of adopted us (and Grace and I them) as family.”

“David, on the other hand,” Mick continued, “is a new-found brother. He got in trouble in one of our churches, and it happened that the Lord sent me down there in time to hear him make a short speech in a council meeting. While he talked the Lord knit my heart to his. I knew he was a man with a word for the church. I could hardly wait to get him up here for discussion because I’ve been fretting about the same things. We need to seek the Lord about these matters. As we do, I think the Spirit will help us see more clearly. I wanted you to join us, Diko.”

“So let’s get started.” He moved the chart closer. “We can take notes as we go. I keep this chart in my office and my secretary transcribes my notes and does research and writing for me. She is quite a gal. Feel free to use the chart any time you wish. Between us, we ought to be able to keep a record of where we’ve been and where we’re going. I’ve also decided, with your permission, to tape the conversation. This will help us in case our notes fail. If you don’t mind, since I’m talking anyway, let me tell you what I think the primary problem is. Then you can do the same. Okay?”

They nodded, so Mick continued,

A Diluted Message

During the many years I’ve been involved in the ministry, ¹ I’ve observed a general drift in the message that the church presents. It’s not a blatant denial, but a subtle neglect of the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The cross is preached more as a ticket to a better life and heaven when we die than as the wisdom of God, the power of God and the instrument of death to our sinful selves. The Christ of the cross is no longer our passion.

¹ Ralls, Richard, (Pastor in Oregon) *Personal Letter*, January 1998.

It is the good life that He supposedly offers us that we seek. The sermons in the New Testament were about Jesus. Modern preaching is about us. Jesus is more therapist than Redeemer!

The message is tailored to the modern hearer. Preachers must be conscious of the needs of people. If we keep it short and positive we get visible results. There's a marriage of psychology and theology. Trends in modern thought are tolerated. While old time preachers quoted Moses and Isaiah, modern preachers quote their peers. Much of modern contemporary Christian music scarcely mentions the blood, the cross or the name of Jesus. Worship is becoming generic and so is the Gospel that is preached!

What Paul expressed as concern in II Corinthians has become reality in our day. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

We must! We must! We must go back to a proclamation of Christ and Him crucified. His birth, His life and teaching, His death, His resurrection, ascension and promise to return are all the subject matter we need to proclaim in order that men may be brought from darkness to light, from sin to holiness, and from separation from God to sonship. We need to return to the Gospel.

His voice was ardent. Then he paused, and said, "David, why don't you go next."

A Forsaken Bible

"Okay," David said quietly. "My concern is that those in authority seem to act like the Bible is not God's Word. They don't teach that Scripture is to be studied, understood, obeyed and taught to others. Instead, they establish doctrines and organizations of their own making. Being non-biblical these structures lack God's anointing and power and do not meet the needs of the people. The result is that many beloved saints—deprived of the opportunity to grow in Christ, please God, and earn eternal rewards beyond imagination—withdraw and wander about disillusioned and in error."

David paused, took a breath and said, "And not only does the rebellion of the leaders weaken the church and cause many to stumble, but it also opens the door to para-church movements that further desecrate God's ignorant people, for once the church departs from the Word it cannot withstand the devil, who easily turns it to self-seeking and separation from the Lord Jesus."

David stopped.

Mick winced, but said, "Your turn, Diko." They looked at the young professor.

A Framework for the Analysis

“That’s heavy,” said Diko. “My world is obviously too sheltered. I hope you’ve overstated those things. Yet, I too, have a concern. It comes from Jesus’ final message. In Revelation chapters two and three He revealed how the churches would fall, yet, in spite of His warning it happened just as He said. In fact, I think I can draw a schematic based on Revelation that will accommodate everything you have to say, and for that matter, all the problems that have occurred throughout church history. Want to see?”

“Certainly,” said Mick.

Diko walked to the chart, stood with his lips pursed, then said, “First, let’s be sure we’re on the same page. I conclude, as did J. A. Seiss, a Lutheran pastor born in 1823,² that the seven churches include the entire church, and every church, and every member of the church, and Christ’s judgment of them from the NT days until the end of the church age. If you can accept that, at least for discussion purposes, I’ll proceed with my diagram.”

“That’s broad enough for me,” said Mick. “How about you, David?”

“I think so,” said David.

You Have Left Your First Love

The paper crinkled as Diko folded the first sheet over the back of the easel. At the top of the page he wrote, *Jesus Christ*, and circled it. Then he said, “The heart of His message is **‘You have left your first love’**. The church at Ephesus was busy with religion. Full of noble deeds, it was commended for its toil and perseverance. It overcame weariness and fought the good fight. Yet, it had abandoned the first command: to love the Lord completely. And for its error, it heard some terrifying words: *Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent*. He was willing to terminate its right of churchhood in Jesus because of this forsaken first love. If true for that church, how much more for us today?”

Mick interrupted passionately, “Jesus is the Gospel. He is Light and Life. He is what it is about. He is Beginning and End. He is the locus and essence of life. He is where our attention belongs; He is worthy. He is God’s love manifested to man. And love is the soul’s compass, for it alone has the power to govern the heart. Love is the only force strong enough to put *others* in the place of *self*, for love dies to self. It is only when self is denied by reciprocating, glowing love for Christ that there can be purity in life or religion. True *love for Christ* places Him in the center of every thought and action, and when He is enthroned, there is no room for self. Then, and only then, can love be pure, for then every desire is to serve and honor Him. There’s no selfishness, for we seek to please Him by abiding in Him, walking in His Spirit, seeking Him in His Word, frolicking in the joy of being with Him, cherishing His Holy

2 J.A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 6th Reprint, 1966)

Presence; therein His Word is not burden; rather, it is delight; having and keeping His commandments, joy, not sorrow. *If a man love me, he will keep my words.*”

“The first works have little to do with preaching, teaching or singing *in the church*, things that are usually considered *our ministry*. Rather, they have to do with life **in** Christ. It is ministry to Him. He is first! He is worthy of honor and glory and praise. We are to be in Him, adoring Him with songs of worship and praise in our hearts and on our lips. Our conversation and thoughts, yea, our very lives are to be full of Him, for the Word says, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment.*”

“The proof of true love is having and obeying His Word. Anyone can claim to love Him, but it’s finding out what pleases Him and doing it, that is the Biblical test for love. *And this is love that we walk according to His commandments.* Jesus did, and so must we. We are also to love our neighbor as ourselves. Such love surrenders personal interest for the needs of others and lays down its life in according to His commands. Yet, even in this, it’s not by our power that we love Him. Rather, we walk humbly with God, and in His mercy, His Spirit reveals Christ to us as we seek Him in His Word. It’s only in His power that we can really love Him. We must rest in Him, and in that rest, work with Him, led by His Spirit.” With that, Mick stopped.

Diko exclaimed, “Mick that was amazing! It was what I was trying to say.” He paused, and then said somberly, “But, to examine our lives is to see that we’ve fallen farther than the Ephesians. Who among us talk only of Jesus; sing of Him continually; and are glowingly in love with Him?”

They were silent, so Diko continued, “While this is so vitally important, yet in my memory, I’ve never heard one sermon take this verse and stress its importance. Such neglect is but another sign of the deception that has neutered the church and left it living a diluted, deluded gospel.”

They were quiet. Finally Mick said, “I confess that my love has cooled. I’m guilty.”

David said nothing. His face was drained. He looked at the chart as Diko sat down.

Mick prayed, “Forgive us, Lord. We are unclean and dwell amidst an unclean people.” And they began to pray. As they did, awareness of the magnitude of their sin pressed upon them. There was weeping and praying. After a bit, the burden lifted, and they humbly regrouped at the table.

Mick said, “None are exempt from the sharp two-edged sword. Let us conduct ourselves with humility, trembling at His Word.”

Then he said to Diko, “You got us into this. Why don’t you continue?”

Didasko said, “I’ve been gripped by this rebuke for months. Surely the Lord is to be feared. We must hear, heed and teach this to others! Yet, the *first love* has been ignored all these years.” Then he wrote, “Forsaking the *first love* opened the door to the mystery of lawlessness and the sins of the Nicolaitans, Balaamites, and Jezebel.”

Diko was animated. “Once you see what I’ve discovered, the whole thing becomes clear, for in telling us what errors were coming, the Lord gave those with ears to hear, knowledge of what to avoid. He gave us the model. It started when the church left its *first love*. Seiss captured their problem.” He picked up *The Apocalypse*, and read:

In the first Epistle, the Lord puts his finger upon the origin of the mischief. Here is depicted a first and model estate, which is described as that of “first love.” From that first love the Savior notes a decline. This is the first picture. It was in the very hearts of Christ’s own people that all corruptions of Christianity and apostasy began. “Thou hast left thy first love.” It is to the heart that Christ traces all evils. And it is according to the estate of the heart that He judges us. Where love declines, bad practices soon creep in. ³

“Seiss said the problem was the heart, which is *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. ⁴ When self usurped Christ, rebellion supplanted love and obedience; and without obedience, the church couldn’t *abide in Christ*; and, outside of Christ, it couldn’t dwell in the *secret place of the Most High*; and outside of God’s protection, it was prey to all forms of sin and deceit, including the Nicolaitans, Balaamites and Jezebel. And, even worse, because of the abominable willfulness of the rebellion, *the Lord poured out a spirit of deep sleep* so that they could not even see the depth of their fall or the disobedience that made it possible.” ⁵

“That is mind numbing shocking,” said Mick.

Didasko took a breath and said, “Let me share what I’ve learned about these wicked ministries, for they are so vile that the Lord defined them as icons of evil.”

The Nicolaitans

“The word, *Nicolaitans*, appears twice in the Scriptures, both in *Revelation 2*. It derives from *nikao* (to conquer, vanquish, overcome) and *laos*, the people. This, too, is the etymology of Nicholas, a common first name. According to the Bible, Jesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans.”

³ Seiss, pg. 78

⁴ Jeremiah 17:9

⁵ That the Lord did this is signaled in Isaiah 6:8-10 and Romans 1:18-32.

Historic Overview

“NT writers warned of the ascension of men whose goal was preeminence in the church. John wrote of *Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.* Paul called them savage wolves and said they would *come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.* Peter and Jude also warned of false teachers.”

“Seiss said the Church was hardly founded until it began to be troubled with lordly pretensions and doings of arrogant men, in violation of the common priesthood of believers. He characterized their emergence.

At first, the Nicolaitans had but few followers and small success. It was not long, however, until they gained adherents and force, and laid the foundations of all subsequent defections and troubles. What in the first picture was feeble, and vigorously resisted, and found only in isolated cases, in the second picture has already grown to be a distinguished and influential party, whose utterances are heard and felt, and which is now characterized as a “synagogue of Satan.” And in the third picture, what were only deeds have come to be taken up as doctrine. The false practices now appear in the shape of an article of faith. What had previously been kept pretty well at bay is now found nestled in the very heart of the Church. ⁶

“He described the emergence of a non-Biblical ecclesiastical system and clergy and traced its development from the early historical writers all the way to modern times. This Nicolaitan system supplanted God’s church and usurped authority from the *priesthood of believers*. In effect, it made spiritually lame men (*laymen*) out of true believers, who, across time, lost the knowledge of how, and even the right, to minister to God. This usurping ministration was odious beyond description, for it hindered believing families from ministering to the Lord in song and praise and prayer; it discouraged men from offering prayer and praise as priest of their homes, from leading their families in same; and from teaching them to live Godly lives. It stole from husband and wife the glory of offering songs in the night to the Heavenly Bridegroom; and it deprived believers of the right to meditate in the Word day and night, learning those things that pleased Him Who bought them at such terrible price. It was an abomination beyond description. It was, it is, absolutely, wickedly, unacceptably intolerable.”

By the time Diko finished, David was on the edge of his seat. He interjected, “That’s amazing. I see it. The Lord foretold what would happen. Surely this framework will accommodate all the error we see today.”

⁶ Seiss p. 78.

“Agreed,” said Mick. “Well done, Diko! That is powerful. And it brings us to something that got David kicked out of church. Let’s let him comment?”

“Certainly. In fact, Mick, I think it would be better to build the structure as we go.”

So Mick said, “David, tell us what you wanted to say at the meeting before the pastor cut you off. I’ve been anxious to hear you from then until now.”

The Rule-of-One

So David said, “I wanted to ask the Council to reevaluate our doctrines, testing ourselves against the Bible, for it, rightly divided, means only one thing, not more! We can have truth, for it says, *If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* With that in mind, I had a few topics to offer, and thought others might also, so that together we could come closer to truth. One question I wanted to ask was why we had *one-man-rule* in the church when the Bible clearly mandates plural leadership.”

“After hearing what Diko told us about Seiss’s teaching, I am certain that the *rule-of-one* reflects the spirit of the usurping Nicolaitans. To me,” here he paused, “the problem is that the *rule-of-one* disobeys the Word, and that puts one at odds with the primary purpose for life: to please God. We please Him by loving Him with our whole heart. While anybody can claim to love God, the real test is obedience: *If you love Me you will keep My commandments...He who does not love Me does not keep My words...* The OT affirms same, *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.* Is it not that simple? To love Him is to keep His commands, and to do that we must test thoughts, doctrines, traditions, practices, songs, etc. by Scripture. Variances must change. If so, we meet God’s criterion. Else, we fail! And this includes, among other things, eliminating the *rule-of-one*.”

Then he added, “I think I can demonstrate that the Bible mandates plural leaders, but if I do, would you agree that it leaves just one question,

Will the church submit to and obey the Word all the time, or does it accept the Bible as governor only when the Scriptures happen to agree with its practices?”

“David,” said Mick, “that logically follows. Don’t you agree, Diko?”

“I’m afraid I must, Mick.”

So David said, “Okay, Jesus appointed plural leaders, and the practice continued

throughout the NT. Titus mandates elders, plural, in every city as does Acts 14. There was one church in each city, and plural elders ruled each. Plural leadership is also seen in Philippians and Thessalonians. This is further substantiated in Acts 20: Paul *sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (plural) of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them...Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, (plural) to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Plural elders were to oversee and shepherd the church at Ephesus.*”

“And other passages also affirm the doctrine. But to summarize what we have: it is incumbent to not quench the Holy Spirit, but, that can only be done by holiness, and holiness by obedience. It is not possible to obey the commands of Jesus and ignore plural government. The test for the church is its willingness to obey God’s commands. Diko showed that Nicolaitans insist on preeminence and control, with a non-Biblical *clergy* firmly governing a non-Biblical *laity*. And this abominable practice is central to most churches today.”

“The *rule-of-one* defiles the church. It reeks, decays, permeates and diseases life. It is now so bad that it is commonplace for the *Pastor* to have a *staff* he hires and fires as if the church belongs to him or is an organization he runs! How can you fire someone from the Body of Christ, for crying out loud? A man can be disciplined *by the church* for sin, but not *hired* or *fired*, especially by one man. The church belongs to Jesus. He is Head. All ministries are an extension of His work through the Holy Spirit: not some man, not any man! For a person or denomination to presume—Jesus’ *headship*; or the Holy Spirit’s role as guide; or to teach that a single man replaces the *five-fold*; or to believe that one man is in charge of or is the primary channel through which the Lord will speak—is so shockingly heinous it’s almost impossible to comprehend. It reeks of the flesh and roots in Seiss’s devilish Nicolaitan doctrine. The Lord hated it and I hate it too. It is horrid. The Lord will deal with most harshly.”

Mishpat sighed and interrupted, “Well, it is clear that we need a break. Let’s get some air,” and He got up and motioned them to the door. “By the way, what time is it?”

Diko said, “I’ve got 11:45.”

“No wonder I’m hungry,” said Mick. “I usually eat before now.” They walked down to the swing.

“What a view,” said David as he limped along. It was also steeper than he imagined.

Mick and David sat on the swing; Didasko stood below them. Mick said, “Diko, when do you need to get back to school?”

“Before 3 o’clock. I have a couple of late lectures this afternoon. Tomorrow I’m available all day.”

Mick looked at David and said, “Well, you dumped a load on us, my Friend. Feel better?”

“I don’t know,” sighed David. “It seems much worse than I thought, unless somehow I’m wrong.”

“If we can’t refute you,” Mick said, “this will shake the denomination to its foundation, because I tell you now, many will choose to ignore correction and cling to their lofty positions. It has always been so. The religious leaders had Jesus crucified, rather than admit He was God. And then, when He came out of the tomb and proved to the Roman guard that He actually was God, they paid them to lie. Rather than admit the truth, even before that magnificent miracle, they clung to pageantry and tradition, ultimately to their eternal damnation.”

“But Mick, truth is truth. The decision is whether we fear God or Man.”

Mick said, “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. We’ve got a lot of talking, thinking and praying to do. Tell us, David, how long can you stay?”

“Probably as long as it takes. I work from home; really, from my computer. So wherever I am I can do business, except when I need to see a client in person. But now’s a good time, before tax season.”

“Good. I was going to suggest we get some lunch, but if you skinny guys can wait, maybe we could move forward until Diko has to leave. Then I’ll get the transcription started so we can get a manuscript as soon as possible.”

“Fine,” said Diko. “I’ll grab a hamburger on the way to school.”

“I’m not hungry,” David said.

“Then, let’s get back to work,” said Mick. They climbed up the yard. Mick watched David. He was blowing by the time they got back to the study.

Mick asked, “Does your leg hurt?”

“Background pain, Mick. I live with it but look forward to the Lord’s return. It’ll be glorious to see Him, and, as a bonus, get a new body. This one will do until then.”

“Good attitude,” Mick said. He followed with, “We’re numbed by your argument. It’s too much to bear. But, let me ask: is there more you wish to say?”

“Wish to? No. Frankly, Mick, I wish I wasn’t here. But there is more that I feel I must say. My hope is to tell you what I think, and then leave the problem for you to fix.”

With almost prophetic words Mich snorted, “Ha, I expect you’ll be in the fray for the long haul.”

So David summarized, “We must abide in Christ, which is to walk in His Spirit. Constantly zealous of the *first love*, we are to examine all doctrines and practices as the Spirit brings light to the Word, *with* a willingness to conform to the truth. We’ll succeed to the extent we do this. I introduced the *rule-of-one*, which Diko calls Nicolaitanism, which the Lord hates. How can we presume to be His, yet rebel against His instructions? There should be plural elders and a five-fold ministry. We need to get on with this.”

So Mick said, “Assume that the denomination wanted to change. How should it proceed?”

Necessary Changes

After a moment David said, “That is a better question for you than me.” But, as requested, David offered that: Jesus is, in truth and practice, the Head of His Church. He then reiterated the need to abide in Christ and to love each other as we love ourselves. He also suggested that the new elders were appointed, they should inaugurate home meetings for teaching and fellowship.

He said that once elders are consecrated, they were to follow the practice of the apostles in Acts six. He reported how deep the anointing and rich the teaching would be when men of God spent days in fasting, prayer and study. Then, with several elders, in-home fellowship could once again become a vital part of church life. New believers and visitors could be readily grafted in. Individuals would be encouraged and equipped to know the Lord and walk in the Spirit; learn to study the Word, put on the armor of God, operate in the gifts of the Spirit, make disciples, and nurture the church in very practical ways. And then concluded by saying that by such empowering and walking in the Spirit, the church could proclaim the Good News, live obedient, godly, overcoming, holy, humble lives, seek to be as perfect as the Father is perfect. This togetherness, learning of Him, obedience, accepting, esteeming, encouraging and urging one another unto good works—this provides a sanctuary for the saints; encourages them to stand in Jesus, overcome the world and the devil. It propels them onto the highways and hedges to find and win the lost, and to take them where they can be loved, nurtured and disciplined themselves, so that the glorious process can be repeated. This love of God, shown in the hearts of His children, would be the light on a hill that cannot be hidden.

Mick smiled at David and then said, “Diko, what do you say?”

“That’s powerful, Mick, and, when you get away from the way we do things, it’s clear that that’s what they did in the NT. I’ve never liked *the wrangling for money*, and the other stuff we do in our meetings. But to my shame, I just accepted it as ‘the way it is’. It never seemed right, but I left it to those in authority. It didn’t occur to me that I have a responsibility to change things. But you know the scariest thing about this?”

“What?” asked Mick.

“As a theologian, Diko said, “I’m supposed to guard against error in the church. Yet I am negligent, and that really bothers me. When you think about how many loving, honest, people through the years have visited, yea, even stayed in our churches for a season—people looking for the sweet Spirit of God—people who were ultimately driven away by the stinky flesh of man, it makes me sick enough to faint. Mick, doesn’t it make you furious? Doesn’t it make you weep, this self-serving error, all supposedly done in the name of godliness; claiming to be faithful men who preach and live the full counsel of the Bible.”

He finished by saying, “The flesh of man is a terrible thing.”

Mick said somberly, “I am very sad. Somehow, in our zeal to serve, we’ve developed traditions that abuse the Scriptures. What can be said? I’m shocked and embarrassed.” He looked at the men and said, “You’ve worn an old man out. What time is it?”

“It’s past 2:00,” said Diko. “I’m tired too. We ought to stop.”

“But before we do,” said Mick, “let’s spend some time in prayer.” And they did. But it wasn’t pretty. In the light of the Word, as the Lord brought them to realize the depth of transgression, they broke down before Him. They prayed until the burden lifted, and then Diko went to school.

Mick and David went out to eat after Faith Pistis, Mick’s secretary, picked up the tapes. They didn’t talk much, and Mick seemed withdrawn. He only opened up about one thing during the meal. It had to do with Faith. Mick said, “She’s a rare person. More than one young preacher has buzzed around here trying to attract her. But her faith is focused. She prays, prays for me all the time, and for her little Sunday school class. She teaches 5-year-olds and loves them as her own. She also grows vegetables in a sophisticated, scientific green house. She hopes someday to feed the world. I don’t know why she hasn’t married. She doesn’t talk about it much. Just says God has not sent His man. She’s one of the finest people I know. But her most striking feature is that she is deeply in love with Jesus. We use her first name, even though her middle name, Elisabeth, which means ‘to whom God is oath’ is lovely too. Surely, her names are well chosen, for she is a rock in the church.”

“Wow,” said David.

“Did you notice that she calls me, Dr. Metano? She’s the only one permitted to do so. I tried my little speech on her. She said, ‘Sir, if you direct me to, I will, but I think it’s more appropriate for the National Director to be honored by his staff, especially his secretary.’ And she was right. What could I say? So she calls me Dr. Metano, and Mercy, Mrs. Metano. It’s the way she is.”

David, who had finished eating, said, “Listening to you makes me think she’s your daughter.”

“She almost is, David. She almost is.”

They retired early that night.

The Next Day

Mick said, “I was frazzled yesterday and still didn’t sleep much. This bothers me deeply.”

“We’ve been plowing through some heavy stuff, Mick,” said Diko, who could see that Mick was upset. “I was almost too tired to play with the children. It was early to bed for me.”

“But we need to press on,” Mick said. He said to Diko, “Would you summarize for us?”

Didasko stepped to the chart, stated, “David said,” and he wrote:

- Our leadership is in grave error.
- Our church is structured incorrectly.
- We misspend our money.
- We preach a distorted Gospel, and
- Practice many other errors.

“I don’t know if he’s right about all that, but I am afraid much of it is so. It breaks my heart to realize that this has happened, if you will, on our watch.” Then he walked to the chart, flipped to his schematic, pointed to *Nicolaitans*, and said, “I showed who the Nicolaitans were, and David told how they impact us today. He talked about the *Rule-of-One*,” and Diko wrote it down, “and the resultant *False Church Order*.”

Diko concluded with, “Mick, if we can give David a rest, I’ll introduce our Lord’s other concerns.”

Mick said, “Do it. We could use a change, huh, David?”

“Indeed,” said David.

Diko began, “Moving from the Nicolaitans, let’s take a quick look at Balaam and Jezebel, icons of evil. Imagine the horror of God using your name as a *synonym for sin*, as the Lord did with these. Whatever they did must be avoided at any cost! Yet, when you understand how they operated, you’ll be shocked to see that the actions of Balaam and Jezebel are not far from any of us.”

The Teachings of Balaam

“I was barely into a study of the *Revelation* when I read Jesus’ rebuke,

But I have a few things against thee because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication...

Historic Overview

“Of the Balaamites, Seiss said,

To the Nicolaitans are added Balaamites, equally condemned by the Savior, though favored by many Pergamites. The sin of Balaam was that he counseled the enemies of Israel to draw them into forbidden friendships and adulterous and idolatrous alliances. The Pergamite Church had those who counseled unlawful unions between the Church and its powerful enemies, thus repeating the apostate prophet, who taught Balak to seduce Israel to sin. Christ pronounced it an idolatrous uncleanness. His view so unfavourably characterizes the Pergamites as to furnish a picture of most fearful advance in the inroads of evil. ⁷

“The Idolatry and spiritual adultery practiced by the Pergamites are still practiced today by many who think they disdain idolatry yet are blinded by their greed. Likewise, rendered sightless by deceitful hearts, they fail to realize it is what you do, not what you say that proves your heart. They fail to understand, idolatry is putting anything ahead of God. Contrast this with God’s Word. We came, and leave, with nothing. We are to forsake even the desire to get rich...”

Jezebel

“And now concerning Jezebel, the third evil icon, was a powerful, wicked person. About her the Lord said, *I have a few things against thee, because you suffer that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and who teaches and to seduces my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not...I am He who searches hearts: and I will give to every one of you according to your works.* ⁸

“Two women, both queens, provide a contrast that exposes the treachery of the wretched, usurping Jezebelian ministry. First is Esther, Queen of the Babylonians. In her youth, she, like Joseph before her, was taken where she did not want to go. Like Joseph, she entrusted herself to Almighty God; and like Joseph, was God’s instrument for deliverance of the nation of Israel. Let’s look at her circumstances, her attitude and her spirit in them, for there are lessons in the life of this young queen which can teach even the most mature among us today.”

“The book of Esther tells the story. It reports that she *was beautiful in form and face; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.* Esther—born in slavery, taken to a harem to provide one night’s pleasure to an uncircumcised, godless king, to be delivered the following morning to the place of the concubines, forever separated from the dream of husband and family—submitted to and set her heart on the God of her fathers. Neither did she forsake the training of her childhood. She was gentle, quiet and obedient. And when it came her time to go to the king, took only what was recommended.

⁷ Seiss, pg. 79

⁸ Revelation 2:20-23.

And the Bible says...*the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.* The ruthless king had never met a woman like Esther, possessor of a kind, compassionate, gentle spirit, a woman upon whom was the Spirit of the Holy God. She submitted to God, to Mordecai and to the king, and her grace and beauty won his heart.”

“She possessed the virtues of submission, compassion, love, mercy, loyalty, integrity, courage and concern for others. She was exalted in the land, and her influence was profound, because she obeyed God, Mordecai and the King. And through her the Lord delivered Israel and advanced Mordecai to ruler of the land, from where he did much good for the king and Israel. Hers’ is a great story, and, on the Day of the Lord, she’ll surely hear the glorious words, *Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.* Well done, good and faithful Esther, well done.”

“But alas, there was *another* queen, Jezebel, daughter of a king. She married Ahab, king of ten of the tribes of the people of the Holy God. Yet she usurped Ahab’s authority and ruled his land in the natural and spiritual realms. Her story is told in 1 Kings 18. She had no intention of submitting to Ahab or to God. Rather, Ahab bowing to her wishes, worshipped her gods. Not content with private religion, Jezebel usurped Ahab’s authority and took it upon herself to destroy the worship of the Lord, while her husband, the king, watched weakly from his throne. The Scriptures report, *For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.* She took it upon herself to rule the spiritual state. And her husband dared not withstand her.”

“Twice during her contemptuous rebellion, God sent a message to Ahab. Though Jezebel had usurped Ahab’s headship, God didn’t grant her that which she (like Satan) coveted: headship in God’s eyes! But He didn’t acknowledge her usurpation. He never flinched: Ahab was accountable, and God dealt with him. To the world, she was in charge; yet God ignored her. On this same point, in the *Revelation*, Jesus rebuked the Thyatirains because they submitted to a woman who called herself a prophetess. Once again, such vile usurpation incurred the wrath of God.”

“As the Lord said, Ahab died in battle and the dogs licked up his blood by the pool of Samaria. They also ate Jezebel’s flesh and scattered her as dung upon the ground. That was the abominable life of Jezebel, the one the Lord set apart for eternal disgrace as a pattern of wickedness. Such contrast between the ways of God, as lived by Esther and characterized by obedience, submission, gentleness and beauty, and the ways of the devil, as by Jezebel, with disobedience, rebellion, self-will, usurpation and disdain for others. Jezebel defied God’s order, disobeyed His commandments and usurped authority.”

Diko concluded, “*Usurpation*, self-willed rebellion against God’s order, is an odious sin. Jezebel’s disdain and rebellion against God’s order is the essence of lawlessness. It reflects the wickedness of the heart. While true of men and women, the warning about Jezebel should be especially heeded by our sisters, for, as unto God, they must avoid usurping authority not given them by the Lord, for Jezebel’s usurpation caused great injury to herself, her husband, and God’s people. Esther submitted to and obeyed God and He blessed her for it. This is clearly taught in the Scriptures. But, with guile, the devil attempts to undermine the Word. He has succeeded to the extent that, today, one is called a *Church Divider* if he teaches the Bible’s counsel on God’s appointed roles for men and women; but the Word sets forth specific instructions for women in the home and the church.”

When he paused, Mick, looking at his watch, said, “We’re moving along just fine. Faith is going to bring lunch, and she hopes to have some transcripts with her.”

They agreed to press on until she arrived.

Mick said, “Like everything we’ve looked at, there is misunderstanding and disagreement about the matter of Biblical subjection and authority. As Diko demonstrated, it is serious to rebel against the Word, because, during the brief interlude of this life we declare to God whether we submit to Him or not. The right answer is to embrace His Word on all points, delight ourselves in His wisdom, and prove our love by joyously obeying His will. As in all things, so with women in the church. But this is a far-reaching topic and I suggest we table it for now.”

After a moment David responded, “Okay Mick if that’s what you wish. But I’d like to drive a stake in the ground here, for the church is as far from truth on this matter as on the one-man-rule that curses the denomination today.”

Mick said, “David, emotions boil on this matter, especially in these days of *political correctness* and *women’s lib*. It’s not a simple problem. Consensus in our leadership is that some things are better left alone.”

David persisted, “Let me cut to the chase: you’re saying leaders have decided that, because correcting this error will be hard, they’re going to ignore it, and then justify their disobedience and fear by saying it is ‘for the common good.’ I remind you...*to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*”

“You don’t get it, David,” Mick growled. “We have other urgent problems. We’re trying to solve them all, but this one is especially difficult.”

There was a long pause. David wanted to drop it, but, sensing the Lord’s urging, said, “You’re not hearing me. The biggest, most urgent problem, the basis for all of them is disobedience! The leaders better decide that the highest priority in life is to obey God, and that includes all

of His Word. We must do what He tells us, the way He tells us, when He tells us, period!”

The doorbell rang. Diko went to check. It was Faith bringing lunch. She handed the sandwich bag and transcripts to Diko and almost sprinted back to her car. (She hated interrupting their meeting and was anxious to leave, because she knew Mick would compel her to come in!) She was backing out of the drive before the patriarch got to the door.

Mick exclaimed, “That young lady is something else.”

They stopped for lunch, but there was little chatter. They were lost in their own thoughts and anxious to resume the discussion, which they did shortly.

Mick restarted, “It’s embarrassing to realize how disobedient we are. We must change the way we follow the Bible.” He paused, looked out the window for a few seconds, then said, “Even so, David, do you really think women are to have no voice in the Church?”

David’s reply was thoughtful, “Mick, I don’t want to offend you, but you phrased that poorly. My point from the beginning has been that we must put aside opinions and seek to understand and do what God says. Our ‘opinions’ don’t matter at all.”

Mick said tersely, “I’ll start over. ‘You say the Bible gives women no voice in the church, right?’”

Diko sensed Mick’s agitation but couldn’t help himself. He laughed out loud, then said, “Papa Bear’s getting sensitive.” He smiled, leaned over and patted Mick on the arm.

The old man grinned sheepishly, shrugged his shoulders, and ventured, “Sorry.”

That gave David time to phrase his response. “Scripture doesn’t say women are to have no voice, and I didn’t mean to give that impression.”

A surprised Mick responded, “You fooled me! What do you mean, then?”

David shook his head. “That’s one of the things I disdain about myself. When I’m trying to make a point it must seem to others that I’m determined to force my opinion on them no matter what they think.”

“That is how you come across, David, and frankly,” and now Mick’s true conciliatory nature manifested itself, “because of that zeal, people are offended and probably push back even if they agree with you. I think this is vital insight into yourself, which you should try to understand and harness, for in every weakness, strength can be found. The key is to understand and use it.” He finished with, “And, David, your strength of Biblical perspective is what we need now. That you see truth and insist on presenting and defending it is priceless. Please, go back to your thought. On my part, I will become less argumentative.”

Mick smiled for the first time in a while. David's comment had given him insight into this complex, sensitive, driven man. Who knows, maybe the use of the moniker 'Limp' was to curb his strong personality by a thinly veiled, self-demeaning façade.

David said, "The point I want to make is that subjection to Christ is required from all. But in the light of the Jezebelian spirit Diko revealed, I wanted to underscore the Bible's teaching about our sister's responsibilities in these things. But Mick, I didn't say (or mean) that women are not to teach. Indeed, they have a vital, God-given responsibility that men cannot fulfill. Titus says, *Older women are to teach what is good, that they may encourage the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.*"

"Just as the highest priority is to love God, so the first requirement in the family is love. The Lord made it clear: husbands were to love and lay down their lives for their wives. Here the Word gives the same instruction to wives. This is the highest call, but it is not simple or intuitive. It must be taught. Likewise love for children is also mandatory. Who knows which of the little ones may be among the greatest servants of the next generation, wonderfully influenced by mothers' love, nurture, instruction and correction."

"Consider Hannah, ⁹ who was barren, *in bitterness of soul, prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, 'O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.'* God opened her womb and gave her a son. She named him Samuel; and because of her consecration, he became Israel's first great prophet. He judged the nation for many years. Hers is a wonderful story."

"Another example is Susannah Wesley, whose sons John and Charles were used by God to turn the United Kingdom from debauchery to Godliness throughout much of the 18th century. Letters to her husband and her son ¹⁰ provide an intriguing synopsis of her life. These letters could be a tutorial for mothers around the world, both of the importance of the task and how to do it. They are recorded in John Wesley's Journal." ¹¹

The men had access to the letters, and when they finished re-reading them, David said, "Is that not the most amazing thing?" What a glorious, opportunity to serve God and man. Who could ask for anything higher or more important? Only ignorance, self-will and/or rebellion could drive one from the glory of God's plan for women unto Jezebelian usurpary."

⁹ 1 Samuel 1:1-2:21.

¹⁰ February 6, 1711, and July 24, 1732.

¹¹ Wesley, John, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1-2, (Baker Books, Reprinted 1998) pp. 384-393

Mishpat sat quietly for a moment, then stood and motioned them to join him at the window. “Please,” he said, and extended his big, rough hand to the stuffed chairs. Then he said, “I’d like to stand here and tell you something. I’m now over seventy-five, but David has stirred memories I’ve not had in a long time.”

They sat and followed Mick’s gaze out into the valley. It was remarkable. Diko could faintly hear the caw of crows as they governed activities in the valley. Mick was lost in thought, so they were quiet for a bit, resting from the fatigue of the discussion.

Finally, Mishpat turned, and with a softened look, said, “I was thinking about my mother. She was wonderful, full of virtue, love, prayer and service to those around her. Of the marvelous memories about her, one stands out today, and if I could hold her one more time, I would thank her for those times when it was just Mother and me. Even when I would return from college, she managed to make time for private conversations, just us two. In those days it never occurred to me that those talks were more than happenstance. Now I know better. She always made time for me. She’d make us a cup of coffee and we’d sit at the dining room table. It was so natural. She must have been one of the best listeners in the world. She would ask about me, what I thought, what I’d done. And oh how I would prattle. I knew she loved me and really wanted to hear. I told her everything, and she listened and listened. She never lectured me, even when we both knew I needed it. Rather, it was as if she treasured my very life in her heart. I knew she would tell Dad, and that, together, they would joy in my story.”

“But this isn’t about Dad, who was a good man, but he would not have been able to let me be. He would have coached and corrected and lectured. No, these times were just for Mother and me. That she loved and believed in me was never spoken but wonderfully understood. I was comforted by her acceptance. I knew she supported me with all her heart. The power of that sustaining love has been with me all my life. I knew I could do whatever I needed to do—because she knew I could. I never drifted far from the ways of God because, not only was she praying, but I knew that it would break her gentle heart if I strayed. She imbued her love into my very being. I think by far, all said and done, she was the most influential person in my life. And she did it as a woman of God. She was submitted to her husband and to the Lord, yet her great love sustained me throughout her life, and even still. Oh how I love Mother.”

They blinked away tears. Finally, Mishpat asked, “Anything else, David?”

After a pause David said, “Let me skim through my notes for a moment,” after which he looked up and said, “There are other issues. I’d actually written several pages about them” and he held them up as evidence, “but they just identify other aspects of encroaching lawlessness.”

“So no, I think I’ve said enough. Rather, I’d like to end with one thought. Let us look at the glory of Jesus’ shining example, and then do likewise. While all power in heaven and earth was His, look at how He used that power. He was consumed with zeal for God’s house. His

obsession was to obey His Father. He did what He saw His Father doing and said what His Father was saying. He healed the sick, raised the dead, opened blind eyes and fed the poor. He fasted, prayed, bled, died and rose again. He selected 12 apostles, gave them His Spirit, and built His church through them. After Him, they preached the Gospel, lived holy lives in the fear of the Lord, loved each other, and prayed and lived just as He did.”

“It is instructive to note that neither Jesus nor the Apostles changed the world system or the governments of men. He could have, but He didn’t. He didn’t destroy the spirit of mammon; nor did he correct the error of the Roman Empire. He could have, but He didn’t. He was not involved in politics. Neither did He boycott a single business; nor march on *Rome*. He could have destroyed Rome, but He didn’t. Neither did He pray that every nation have goodness flowing from sea to shining sea. Neither did He instruct His disciples to pray that way. He knew the cities of the world, are of the world, and will perish with the world! He knew that all systems—political, judicial, industrial, educational, monetary, entertainment, mass media, etc.—were of the devil’s domain, were incorrigible and destined to perish on the Day of Lord. Therefore, He made no effort to patronize, befriend, align Himself with, or correct them; nor did His disciples. He went about preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, doing what He saw His Father doing, and saying what He heard His Father saying.”

“He left Satan and his minions in place as when He arrived, except Satan was judged for slaying an Innocent Man, and the Lord took the keys of death and hell. He dealt astutely with hardened, rebellious sinners and with the Pharisees who rejected Him. He did not say, as many today, ‘love the sinner, but hate the sin’; rather, He gave them up to a reprobate mind. He spoke in parables, so that in hearing they might *not* hear, and seeing they might *not* see. He said, *do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.*¹² His message was *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me*. He did not compromise: He preached, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”

“He did not change a world that had been given over to Satan. Rather, He planted the Kingdom of God in the hearts of simple men, and through them confounded the wisdom of the wise, the might of the strong, *Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* Through His church, empowered by the Holy Spirit and founded upon Him, He breathes life, hope and goodness. *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*”

¹² Revelation 22:10-12.

“He came to give life; He spoke absolute truth every time He spoke. It will be done His Father’s way. All who come to God will come through Jesus Christ. They will willingly bow before Jesus, take up their cross and follow Him, learning and obeying His Holy Word. There is no other way. The wisdom of man is foolishness; the goodness of man, filthy rags; the ideas of man, nonsense.”

“He didn’t remold a world destined for destruction. To do so He would have had to recreate man, give him a new heart and take away his right to choose to worship and obey God. He could have; but He didn’t. Instead, He subscribed to God’s plan. *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*”¹³

David concluded, “God is calling His people and conforming them to the image of Christ, that He may be the First Born of many brethren. They will live on a New Earth, in a glorious New City, with a Wondrous God and His Marvelous Son. The method for that *calling out* is the proclamation of the Gospel and living together in the church. Every effort should be directed to advancing the kingdom the only authorized way, the instructions of the Bible as implemented by a church empowered by the Holy Spirit. That is God’s vehicle; it is all that’s needed.”

Mick stood. “David is right. Our apostate church faces imminent judgment, for God has always required His people to walk in His ways. When they refused, rebelling without remorse after being warned over and over, He punished them. Remember, those were His people. Imagine His wrath toward heathen nations that reject Jesus and make no effort to love Him or keep His commandments: rather, that provoke and challenge Him, endorse the *abominable* and ridicule the *holy*. Our own country, led by officials who wink at personal sin, is headed down the broad, high-risk road to destruction. Among its many sins, it is accountable for the blood of countless unborn children—children most heinously betrayed by the worst betrayal conceived in the pits of hell, mothers having the brains of their own children sucked out and dumped in the repugnant garbage cans of **Choice**. Their blood cries out from the earth, as did Abel’s 6,000 years before. God hears it as clearly now as then.”

“Leaders of this godless state empower mass genocide—murdering physicians and murdering mothers—face severe punishment. Infiltrated by tares from the devil, they capitulate to vain railings of unholy usurpers and pass legislation that defies the Living God. Banning prayer and Bible reading on one hand, they authorize abominable practices on the other. In spite of the Bible’s resounding warning against homosexuality, they pass laws

¹³ 2 Peter 3:10-13.

encouraging the same, daring God to again destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. The United States is guilty of many vile and weighty sins. As God has dealt with His own people, so He will judge this and all heathen nations that scorn Him. Were it not for believers, the salt of the earth, this country would have already fallen like every other sinful nation that has stunk up the earth before it.”

Mick was silent. They all were.

Finally he spoke again, “David, you’ve challenged things I’ve always believed; things I’ve never even questioned, things that were practiced by men and women I loved and trusted. You’ve raised vital questions. Diko and I hear you. And that, as I remember, was all you asked. Thank you, My Friend.”

Diko added, “David. I’m staggered.”

David smiled weakly and bowed his head.

Mick patted him on the back. “Good job.”

Then he turned to Diko and asked, “Will you summarize for us?”

Didasko's Summary

"I'll try." He stood and flipped back to his original schematic. "The Lord's messages to the seven churches encompassed everything David said. I'm shocked, nonetheless. Apathy, ignorance, deception and rebellion have overtaken the church. A stagnant, torpid river of evil oozes from it. The Gospel is diluted and the Word disobeyed by leaders, local assemblies, and individuals. Its structure and message are perverted. Nicolaitans established a hated *clergy/laity* relationship that permeates Protestant and Catholicism, and results in the *rule of one*. The church, no longer anchored in Christ, misinterprets, misapplies, or distorts Biblical truth to its own ends. In order to meet its goals, it dilutes the Word to make it palatable to the largest number of clients, liberally promising prosperity to those who give to its treasury."

"In regard to the individual, we saw the emergence of self-centered lawlessness. We concluded that ignorance and rebellion were the roots of naming-and-claiming and the prosperity dogma. We shuddered when we examined the impact of *Jezebelian usurpery* and lamented that it is sponsored by men more afraid of the impact on the budget than of pleasing God. They tiptoe as eunuchs through Jezebel's bloody chambers rather than face the risks of correcting an error that has plagued our church for a hundred years."

"When you get away from the '*I'm okay, you're okay*' mentality of church politics, and remember the thousands, or is it, millions, who've been kept in error thereby and think about this sin in the light of the Word which one day will judge all actions, it's easy to see why David feels so strongly."

"In that day, I, for one, don't want anyone in desperation and terror to scream at me,

***'You should have warned me.
You should have made me listen!'***

Let us fear the Lord, who will judge the living and the dead, the One with whom we have to deal. Let us tell it like it is, whether the church leaders like it or not"

Then Mick turned and asked David, "Is there anything left to say?"

David responded, "The bottom line is this, if today's leaders hold fast to their traditions, what are believers trapped in their infrastructure to do?"

There was silence, so, after a moment he said, "The answer is that they must earnestly seek reformation, pleading with the leaders to obey the Bible. But, when these efforts fail (as they surely will) they must come out—as Lot from Sodom—prepared to build life together according to the Bible. There is no other choice."

Finally he stopped.

Mick got up, shook his hand, then Diko's. "I'm encouraged that the next generation has men like you two. We must get the manuscript finished. If it's okay with you, David, I'll ask Diko and Faith to formulate a document from our tapes. We need to see what's been said. We can then edit the work and decide how to present it to the denomination."

"David said, "Sounds good to me, Mick, if we can impose on them to do it."

They looked at Diko, who said, "It's an honor. Besides, David carried the bulk of the effort. I'll be glad to work with Faith on the draft, as long as you agree to critique it."

"I'll make sure she can focus on it. We've got a deal, right, David?"

"Absolutely," said David.

So Mick said, "I think we're done, except to give this load to the only one strong enough to carry it. The church belongs to Jesus. We are but His unprofitable slaves. Let's pray, and after that let's relax until Faith gets here with lunch."

When they finished praying Mick asked, "What time is it?"

It's about 10:00," said Diko. "Mick, since we've finished early, I think I'll run out to school for a bit. Will you ask Faith to leave a copy of the draft in my box as soon as she can? I'll start editing right away and feed the comments to her as I go. We should have a working copy in a few days. Then we can decide whether to critique the paper via e-mail, or together, assuming David can come back up."

They looked at David and Mick said, "Could you return, David?"

"If you wish. Otherwise, this has been an amazing experience for me."

Diko said, "David, if you want, you can probably catch the 2 o'clock flight today."

"Let's give that a shot," said David.

Mick said, "I'll have Faith make a reservation. You can pick up the ticket at the airport."

They stood up. Diko shook David's hand and said, "It's a pleasure to meet you, brother. Thanks for your work. I'll look forward to finishing the paper together."

"The pleasure's mine," said David.

Diko hugged Mick and said, "Bye, Papa, talk to you soon."

"Be careful, Son. Thanks for your help. My love to the family."

Diko left for school.

“David, let me make a few calls. If you need to do the same, I’ll use the cell phone.”

“No, I’m okay. I think I’ll get ready to leave while you do that.” He headed up to his room.

David finished packing and went downstairs. He was partly through the door when he realized Mick was still on the phone. He stopped but Mick waved him in. He took a seat and looked into the valley. It was beautiful. In the background he could hear Mick telling Faith he needed to go check on his granddaughter. When they hung up, Mick joined David at the window.

“David, they’ve taken Sarah to the hospital. She’s having pains. The baby’s not due for a couple of months...” His voice trailed off. “It’s precautionary; but, since we’ve finished, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll run over there. Faith will bring you some lunch and take you to the airport. Okay?”

“Of course, Mick! Don’t worry about me. I’ll catch a cab. I hate to trouble her.”

“It’s the least we can do. Faith doesn’t mind. In fact, she feels like she knows you, having heard you talk so much.” They laughed. “She’s great. You’ll enjoy meeting her.”

Mick looked at the door and David said, “Why don’t you get out of here. I’ll be fine.”

As they walked out of the room, David said, “Mick, it has been my pleasure to meet you. I’m sorry to offend you so much...”

“Would to God that the church was full of men like you, David.”

They’d reached the door. Mick said, “Pray for Sarah and the baby. I’ll call you in the morning and let you know how they are.” He slipped through the kitchen into the garage. David heard the car start. He walked to the front window and watched Mick back out and turn down the hill.

In the study again, David sat in one of the big chairs. He prayed for the granddaughter, then leaned back and began to reflect on the whirlwind meeting. It seemed but a moment, and then he heard the doorbell again. He looked at his watch and realized he’d dozed off. He hurried to the front door and opened it. A striking young woman stood there with a bag in one hand and a file folder in the other.

“Hi, you must be Faith. Please come in. I’m David Lameman. Here, let me take that,” and he took the bag of sandwiches.

“Hi, Mr. Lameman. How are you?”

“Fine, thanks,” said David. “I am pleased to meet you. I have heard nothing but good since I got here.”

She laughed and said, “Thank you” as they walked to the kitchen. Then she said, “I really prayed for Sarah. I think she will be fine. But it is wise to check.”

David looked at her. She seemed confident. He put the bag on the table.

She said, “Dr. Metano wants to make sure you are comfortable. He hated to leave; yet he is a real family man.”

“He did the right thing.”

“I brought barbeque sandwiches and a great salad from Hartax’ Deli, one of our favorite places around here. I Hope that is okay.”

“Yum. Sounds good to me.”

“What would you like to drink?” She opened the refrigerator and said, “Looks like we have coke, orange juice, milk or water. Or I could make a pot of coffee?”

“Coke will be fine, thanks.” She was very pretty.

“The specialty at Hartax’ is barbecue. Everybody who visits us loves them. Dr. Metano suggested a pork or beef platter. I bought one each. What is your preference?”

David looked at her with a twinkle in his eye. “Do you like them both?”

“I do indeed.”

“Then, let us split them down the middle.” And they did.

She discreetly studied this reserved man. Captivated by the depth of his message as she typed his words, hour after hour she had come to feel that she knew him. He seemed compassionate but shy; powerful, but persuasive. She marveled how easily he was peer to two of her most esteemed friends.

On his part, David saw a beautiful, graceful sister in the Lord. He chided himself for not being able to entertain her with proper conversation but was unable to coordinate his mind and mouth. Afraid she might think him slow, he prattled nervously.

Even so, it was a pleasant time, and it was with a strange sensation in his stomach that he watched her drive away from the airport gate. He hoped to see her again.

WRAP-UP

Editing

David flew home, his mind whirling. The conversations had been stressful; yet he was relieved to share his burden. Mick called the next day to thank him for coming and to say that Sarah and the baby were fine. The pain stopped before they got to the hospital. She stayed overnight and went home that morning. Mick said he would call again when they e-mailed the transcript.

That Friday he did, saying, “The draft has been sent. But please come back and let us finish this together. Bring an overcoat. We expect a storm this weekend.”

David downloaded the file and started reading. It was a large manuscript. He read all day, including on the plane, and had a reasonable grasp of the paper by the time he arrived.

Diko joined them for breakfast. Mick asked, “What’s the status on the weather?”

“They’re forecasting snow as early as this afternoon,” Diko said. “It is supposed to be one of the worst storms we have had, especially this early in the season. It is already getting cold.”

Mick explained that, because they were rural, mountainous and seldom had severe winters, heavy snow stopped everything. Then he said, “Let’s build a fire and decide how to proceed.”

Diko said, “Before we start, let me say that Faith did a terrific job. I knew she was good, but I had never worked that closely with her before. It was a pleasure.”

Mick said, “That’s Faith. By the way, I invited her to join us today and to spend the weekend. Sometimes she stays with us. It is always great to have her. She can set up her laptop and edit as we go, if you think that will work. She should be here by 9:00. I thought we might need a few minutes to get started.”

Diko said, “Let us collect our thoughts while we wait for her.”

They had papers and Bibles spread all over the table and were making notes when the doorbell rang. They heard Mercy and Faith laughing and talking. They got up and headed for the living room just as Mercy said, “Burr, it’s cold out there.”

“I was listening to the radio as I drove over,” Faith said. “They say it will be below freezing before noon. I even saw snowflakes blowing as I drove up the mountain.”

The men joined them. It was noisy and fun. Greetings exchanged all around, Mick said, “Can we bring anything in for you?”

“I have some things in the back seat, if you don’t mind.”

Diko was the first one out. He picked up her computer bag and a small suitcase. David took her overcoat, gloves and boots. He locked the back door. Her car was a light purple Corolla. It was clean but too old to have an electric lock.

“Boy it’s colder than when I came over an hour ago,” said Diko as they popped back inside. Then he asked, “Where do you want Faith’s things, Mama?”

“Put her stuff in her bedroom.” Then Mercy laughed and said, “I mean the one she uses when she stays with us, the one across from the study...” she paused, then said, “and you will want her computer in the study with you, right, Mick?”

“We’d like Faith to be with us, if it won’t distract her too much.” He looked at her and said, “Let’s play it by ear. Start at the table. If we are too noisy, or if you can’t follow us on the computer, we can put you at my desk or in another room. Whatever is best.”

She smiled and said, “Fine by me.”

They ended up in the study. The men made room for her at the table. She took her laptop and powerpack out of the case, tactfully looking for a place to put the bag. Diko jumped up and moved it out of her way over to the corner of Mick’s big desk. “Thanks, Diko” she said. Faith sat across from David, between Mick and Didasko.

David, quiet during the settling in, noted how striking she was in jeans and jacket.

Mercy came in with a serving tray. It had a pitcher of orange juice and glasses. She handed it to Mick who put it in the center of the now full table. Mercy asked, “Would you like anything else?” Mick looked at their guests who all shook their heads. So he said, “No thank you, Darling. Would you care to join us?”

“Goodness, no,” she exclaimed, and then added, “besides, I have a lot to do in the kitchen today.” She started to leave, but Mick caught her lightly by the arm. She stopped and looked back at him. He said, “By the way, we would like to stop by 2:30 today, finished or not. We can resume Monday, if necessary. Mercy bought some great steaks, and, before we grill them, Diko, you can run home and get the family. Okay?”

Before Diko could respond, Mercy added, “I plan to make potato salad and lots of other good stuff.”

“You are making that delicious potato salad? Bravo, Baby,” said Mick.

“Sounds like fun, weather, permitting,” said Diko. I’ll call Grace when we take a break. I know she and the children would love that.”

“I’ll get started,” said Mercy as she left the room.

Then Mick said, “Thank you for coming. We know this is important. Tell us how to proceed, Diko.”

The professor said, “Faith and I have a good start on the manuscript. Our first task should be to look for errors, clutter and omissions. I think we can do this in a day or so. Faith and I will get the final document to you,” and he looked at Mishpat, “as soon as possible. You will need to decide what is next. I suggest we start on page one and work our way through the paper. Faith may be able to make the corrections real time. But, before we start, we certainly need to ask the Lord to guide and empower us for this task.”

Mick said, “Let us pray,” and he asked for God’s guidance and blessing. Then pointed to Diko.

“We have a reasonable grip on content, but the arguments are combative. We need to soften the words to make it clear that we are for the church, not against her.”

“I agree,” said Mick. “It does little good to be right but have no readers because they threw the book away in anger. Right, David?”

“Absolutely,” said David. “I come across harshly in the text. It must have been offensive to Faith.” They laughed. “The words need help, but not from me. I am even less writer than speaker.”

“Nonsense. You did well,” said Diko. “Remember, it was just friends talking, seeking truth. But I do think we can moderate the language without compromising its meaning.”

“Good,” said David.

“Before we start, though,” said Diko, “I would like to ask, were we really finished? It seems that, at the end, we might have been too abrupt.”

“Anything particular,” asked Mick?

“No. It is just that we were so very deliberate for two days and then sort of just bolted for the door. Know what I mean?”

“How do you feel, David,” asked Mick?

“Diko has a good point. In retrospect, it was surprising how fast we stopped. It seemed that one minute we were talking, and the next I was on a plane heading home.”

“Well then, let us ask the question,” said Mick. “Anybody want to add or change something?”

They thought for a minute, then David said, “Actually, I would like to clean up a couple of things.”

“And now that you mention it, I would too,” Mick added.

“Good,” said Diko. “Who wants to go first?”

Mick pointed to David and said, “Go ahead, young man.”

So David said, “I have two concerns: first, the church acts like the Bible is not God’s Word; and second, we do not pray as we ought. Concerning the first, Scripture is to be studied prayerfully and obeyed consistently, for it is the standard for life. We need to do what Jesus and the Apostles did, which is submit to, quote, and rely on Scripture, for the Bible, *rightly understood*, supports and interprets itself. Jesus said, *Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.* ¹⁴

“He included the *Prophets* and the *Law*; and interchanged the terms *Law* and *commandments*. He fulfilled the Law Himself; and tasked us to keep and teach the commandments. Not only did He quote and stand on the OT, but He also built the NT from it, forging an integrated Bible. He fashioned the NT upon the Law and the Prophets! The OT and NT are truly ‘warp and woof’ of an integrated Scriptural tapestry. He elevates the requirement for righteousness from the *letter of the law* to the *spirit of the Law*.”

“Likewise, the Apostles and other NT writers directly quoted the OT more than 500 additional times, and further, they referenced it an amazing 2,400 times. In other words, the NT is built on over 3,000 references to the Old, or about 10 references per NT page. Imagine, such intense integration. We could look at this in detail, but I don’t think it is necessary.”

“We see that the OT was the foundation for the New, and that the two combine to become *the commandments of Christ*. And so we see that the entire Bible is to be understood and obeyed! We cannot pick-and-choose, holding some things, ignoring others. We must examine *all* of the Word, taking *all* of its counsel on each subject, carefully testing *all* passages against *all* of the Word. This enables us to have truth without conflict. It can be

¹⁴ Matthew 5:17-20.

done, it must be done, for the Scriptures were inspired by one glorious God, who is consistent, who gave us His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth.”

“Finally, let me add, it was no wonder Paul referred to Timothy as a man of God. You see, Paul and Timothy were together for at least seven years. If they were awake 16 hours a day, that’s some 40,880 hours of on-the-job training. Contrast that with the lack of discipling today. Few are led into the streets and mission fields to learn to proclaim the Gospel, after days of fasting and praying for the Lord’s anointing and blessing. How many hours a week are young men trained to teach and preach in home and group meetings; how many hours are spent with *the pastor* in prisons and hospitals ministering to the downtrodden? How many are led out from the *four walls* into a hurting, sin-filled world—the place where both Jesus and Paul labored?”

“But that’s not how we do it. The church just ignores God’s Word. It is as if the ***Way of the Bible*** has been lost. Even in our best programs young men spend less than an hour in Sunday School (mostly listening, not learning how to teach), two hours in worship services (mostly listening), one hour on Wednesday night (mostly listening) and maybe a half hour a day studying the Word. That is less than five hours a week mostly listening. At that rate, it takes a year and a half to receive less training than Timothy had in a month. At those ratios it would take over twenty-six years to get less training than Timothy received in seven years.”

David concluded, “As you see, we have lost the *Way of the Word*.”

“And before I stop let me add one additional lament: the way we pray is deplorably short of the apostles’ teaching and example, the very ones whom the Word of God commands us to follow in all things. But in truth, today I just do not have the energy to set forth the magnitude of this great disobedience. Maybe we could pick this up at another time.”

They were quiet for a few moments, after which Mick groaned, “Oh how we have fallen.” With that, they were silent.

Finally Diko said, “I hate to intrude, but Mick, do you still want to make another comment?”

Judgment, Revisited

Mick extracted himself from his thoughts, “Diko, what I said about *judgment* was inadequate. The fact is believers must be continuously vigilant. I talked about impending judgment on both God’s people and the heathen nations, including ours. While the true family of God is those who demonstrate holiness by knowledge, obedience, and love for the Lord; which love occupies heart, soul, mind and strength; love which compels adherents to forsake the world and follow Jesus, for this is the most important thing in eternity.”

“God defined sin, and it is for man to understand and adhere to His definition. Our task is to teach that any interpretation that disagrees with the Word of God is at odds with the God of

the Word. When you look at His dealing with sin throughout history, you will marvel that His judgment has been forestalled for so long. David made it clear: the OT and the NT, together, are the Word of God; the NT being built directly on the OT, but with higher (not lesser) requirements, in that the spirit of the law (not just the letter) is to be understood and lived.”

“But in my comments, while I’ve showed instances where wickedness reeked so badly that God purged the land, it was fundamentally OT. So, I just want to take a minute to also look at the NT.

Romans summarizes, *for this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them...*¹⁵

“Do you understand the magnitude of this sin? Not only is adultery, etc., practiced by many, but it is encouraged and approved by an increasing number of people. I do not single out homosexuality as being worse than the rest, for all the debauchery God lists are equally bad. But I mention it because many are confused by society’s constant hammering that men-with-men or women-with-women is simply a matter of *choice*, being neither better nor worse than husband-with-wife. But these, along with murder and all the other sins, are abominations in God’s eyes.”

“The Word defines what sin is, what God has always done about it, and what He will do in the future. The message is the same today, *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the gospel. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

“Jesus’ somber conclusion is this, *‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*

¹⁵ Romans 1:26-32.

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

He stopped and waved his hand at Diko, who said, “Mick, only one question remains: ‘Who will have ears to hear?’”

At that moment Mercy came into the room with the portable phone. She said, “Sorry to interrupt, but this is Grace. She’s concerned about the storm.” She handed the phone to Diko, and they all peered out the window.

“Wow, look at the snow,” Mick exclaimed. They’d been so intense that they’d failed to see it had started. It was falling heavily. “It sure got here early. It wasn’t supposed to start until late today.”

“It’s beautiful,” said Faith. They stood for a minute watching.

Diko told Grace goodbye, looked at Mick and said, “I’m going home before the streets get too bad. I’ll call later and we can talk about what is next.”

“Makes sense, Diko. Be careful driving. God bless you and the family.”

Diko headed for the door. Mercy caught him and handed him a bag of steaks. She said, “Here, take these. I doubt if you’ll be able to come back today.”

“Thanks, Mom. But you don’t need to do that.”

“There’s more than we can eat in the kitchen. I’m sorry the meal isn’t ready. And I’m sorry you guys will miss the party. Come back if you can.”

He hugged her and darted out the door into the swirling snow.

They watched him leave and then stared at the snow. “What time is it?” asked Mick.

“It’s 11:15,” said David.

“Let’s peck away at the manuscript,” said Mick. They went back to work. David moved around the table so he could show Faith his changes. He was amazed how fast she typed, and how smart she was. He was surprised how quickly she picked up the corrections. No wonder Mick bragged about her.

They were well into the mark-up when Mercy announced that it was 2:30.

“That’s it. Put your pencils down; turn off that computer; let’s party,” said Mick Metano. And there was no back talk.

Part 3—Story Within the Story

Faith went to the window. The snowfall has stopped. She said, “Look at that! I’d like to be immersed in that beauty for a few minutes. Anybody like to go?”

“Not I,” said Mercy, shivering.

“Nor I,” said Mick. “David, you mustn’t let the lady go alone.”

David looked at Faith and said, “Let’s go for it.”

They went through the kitchen. It was warm and smelled good. Mercy had an apple pie baking in the oven. She also had a pot of baked beans on the stove. The potatoes and eggs for the salad had been boiled and were cool enough to peel. She was doing that when they passed by.

“Sure you don’t want to go, Mrs. Metano,” asked Faith?

“Goodness, no. It’s too cold for me out there.”

When Friends Meet

They buttoned overcoats, put on gloves and wool hats and walked out into the garage.

By the time they got outside, Faith began to wonder if this was such a good idea. The wind was picking up and it was really cold. But she didn’t want to back out now.

Mick watched them walk down the drive and on to the road. Then he went into the kitchen and put his arms around Mercy. He whispered in her ear, “Mrs. Metano, I love you. Need some help?”

“You can sit here and talk to me. How are we going to proceed with dinner?”

“I thought I’d set up the Hibachi grill in the fireplace in the study and cook there. This would let us keep the fire in the family room. I suggest we eat by the fire and watch winter unfold.”

Faith and David walked slowly down the hill. The snow was blowing across the road and already beginning to drift. “Isn’t it beautiful, David? It is so clean and pure when it falls. It reminds me of God’s love for us on the one hand and of His call for us to live holy lives on the other.”

“That’s well said, Faith.” He looked at her and she could see that he meant it and that he was listening to what she had to say.

“Sometimes,” she continued, “I get so tired of wickedness and hate. It makes me want to disappear into the pure white love of God.”

“David said, “You’re in good company. The Bible says, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* The Lord has given you His word that you shall one day drink your fill of His righteousness; and there will be no sin or treachery there. It will be glorious, Faith. He knows you by name.”

She slipped her hand under his arm and began to sing,

When all my labors and trials are ‘or
And I am safe on that beautiful shore
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore
Will through the ages be glory for me

She had a beautiful soprano voice. She sang the melody wondrously. David couldn’t help it. He began to sing the tenor as she came to the refrain,

Oh that will be glory for me
Glory for me, glory for me
When by His grace I shall look on His face
That will be glory, be glory for me.

“Faith that was sparkling. I didn’t know you could sing.”

“Nor I you, David.”

“Let’s sing it again,” he said. And they did. In fact they sang for some time. It was wonderful. Finally David put his arm around her as they walked and said, “I’ve never had a better time. But we should get out of this cold, don’t you think?”

“She leaned her head against his shoulder for a minute and whispered, “David, I’ll tell you something if you promise not to tell.”

“What’s that?”

“I’m freezing.”

They headed back, and laughed and sang all the way up the hill. He even challenged her to a race to the driveway. It was silly. She slipped as she turned in to the drive and landed in the snow. David hopped/limped/ran up behind her and then fell beside her when he tried to help her up. She hit him with a hand full of snow. They laughed so hard they couldn’t get up.

Finally they crawled on their hands and knees to Faith's car. David pulled himself up and helped her.

He said, "Faith, we must get a hold of ourselves. We're in front of the National Overseer's house. He might over see us."

And that triggered their laughter again.

What they didn't know was that it just so happened that Mick and Mercy were looking out the window, wondering what kept them so long. They saw the whole thing. And they were laughing too.

Mick opened the front door and yelled, "You two better get in here before you freeze."

They managed to go in with straight faces, but when they saw Mercy trying not to laugh, they all started again.

Faith said. "You sent me out with a mad man," and she threw a glove at David.

They laughed.

"Here, Mick, you take their coats and get them to the fire. I'll get these children some cider. I think the cold got to them," Mercy said. He went down the hall to hang the coats.

They sat by the fire. David looked at Faith and said, "That was fun."

She looked at the man in front of her and said quietly, "Thank you, David; it really was." And music cascaded in her heart. Could this be the one: this David, this earnest, somber man of God? She laid her head back on the sofa and breathed a silent prayer.

He broke the silence, "The fire feels good. I hope you are not hurt anywhere."

"No. I'm fine. How about you?"

He managed, "Me too," but he was thinking how fine she really was.

Fellowship in Christ

Mercy brought cider for all. Mick joined them and they sat looking out the window, warmed by the cider and the fire, wondering what was happening in their midst. The snow was falling harder. The sky was dark, and the wind began to howl.

Mick said, "You got back just in time. We were getting concerned."

"We had fun out there," said David, "but, man, it was cold."

“I started the coals a while ago. If everybody’s getting hungry, I’m ready to start the steak. We’ll be able to eat in half an hour, if you’re ready, Darling.”

They were starving, except maybe Mercy, who, of course, felt it her duty to sample the potato salad and beans as she fixed them. She said, “Let’s do it. The steaks are on the platter in the kitchen. Do you need anything else?”

“No, except maybe another cup of cider when you get a chance.”

Faith said, “Let me help you finish. The ladies walked out of the room together.

“David, want to keep me company?” asked Mick.

“Sure.” As he got up he could tell he would be sore the next day. Mick picked up the steaks from the kitchen and headed to the study.

When he left, Mercy said, “What happened out there?” She was excited and curious.

“Mrs. Metano, I’m not sure. But it was wonderful. We were talking about the Lord. Then, right in the middle of our conversation, I burst out singing. And David sang too. He has an excellent voice.”

“Yes, I’ve heard him. So what happened then?”

“Nothing, I mean, we just walked and sang, and we started to laugh. You know, he has the keenest sense of humor. He kept me laughing, about the silliest things. And we walked and we sang.”

“Then we realized that we were freezing. We started back and when we got close to your home he challenged me to a race. It was just like we were children. I was running before I knew it. And then we fell down and had a snow fight. It seemed so different from the man whose heavy heart and weighty words I’d come to respect; and thought I knew.”

“I know what you mean, Faith. After all these years, I still marvel at the compassion in Mick’s heart. A man of God is strong in his Lord; and able to protect the treasure of our life we give to him. I continually thank God that He made me one with my lord Mick.”

“Wow. I’ve never heard a woman say that before. I know it’s Scriptural, but I’ve never met a woman call her husband, lord.”

“Faith, years ago he captured my heart. I gave him everything I am and have. He has protected, nurtured, championed and exhilarated me in his love all these years. I trust him with my feelings and my very life. There is nothing I have that I withhold from him. He makes

me glad I'm a woman; glad I'm his. And that is what God intends for those who are determined to obey and serve Him."

"That's beautiful, Mercy, and, I can't bear to say Mrs. Metano any longer. You're too precious."

"Faith, I've never liked you to call me that."

They were putting the finishing touches on the trimmings while they talked. Mercy said, "I'm going to take some more cider to the guys. Want to come?"

"In a bit. I need to powder my nose and quiet my heart. Mercy, thank you for sharing about your relationship. It's encouraging to hear that such excellence can be achieved. I've always been afraid of falling short of oneness with a husband."

"You're welcome, Darling." Mercy kissed her on the forehead. "But it can't be done without him being a man of God; one who seeks to understand the Word and to become more and more like the Lord; else he can never love you enough to release you to be all you were created to be."

"I think I understand."

Mercy could smell the steaks as soon as she left the kitchen. She went into the study. Mick said, "Hey, you ladies all right?"

"We're fine. We were just having a little *girl* talk. It smells totally good. You about ready?"

"My guess is another five minutes. Where's Faith?"

"She's in her room. She should be out in a minute."

"Great," Mick said. "David's been keeping the fire going in the family room."

"I've set up a buffet. Let's serve our plates in the kitchen and go to David's fire. By the way, I made a pitcher of iced tea. Does that sound good? We also have coke, water, OJ, cider or coffee."

"Tea is perfect for me," said David.

"Me too," said Mick.

Faith walked in. Mercy said, "Come on Faith," and she reached her hand out to her young friend.

She took her hand and said, "Let's fix these guys, Mercy." They left the room.

"What do you think that was all about, Mick? You're the expert."

"I don't know, but I heard Faith call Mercy by her name. Something's up. I predict we'll know before the day is over. You see, ladies can't sit on anything for long. They have to talk about it. If we play our cards right, we'll soon be in on the mystery."

"Sounds like fun."

"OK, David. I think these steaks are just right. At least I hope so. How about holding the platter over here and let me load it up."

"Good grief, Mick. They're heavy. How many pounds do we have?"

"Enough, David, just barely enough."

They went to the kitchen. There was a real spread: potato salad; baked beans; corn; tossed salad; steak; and for dessert, apple pie a la mode.

"Let's pray before we help our plates," said Mick, and he reached out and grabbed the closest hands. They joined hands in a circle and then Mick said, "in fact, before we pray let's sing," and he started singing a song of thanksgiving,

We thank Thee Lord for Jesus Christ
And for the blood He shed,
We thank Thee for His risen life
And for our daily bread.

He, Mercy and Faith sang. David had never heard the song.

Then Mick prayed, "Father, we thank you for the sanctuary of a comfortable house in the midst of such a storm. We thank you that Jesus is our shelter for all of life's storms. We thank You for Your bountiful provision; and we consecrate ourselves to your service. We commit every moment of this day to you and ask for your anointing on our words and thoughts. In Jesus name, Amen."

Faith had put lap trays in the family room. She started to pick up iced tea glasses to take them in, but Mick said, "House rule number 2, Ladies first." Mick grabbed her and put her at the head of the line. She picked up a plate and started dipping up goodies.

David asked, "What's house rule number 1, Mick?"

"You know what that rule is."

“Of course, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* Right?”

“Right on, Brother,” said Mick. Okay, Sweet Mercy, slide in there. David will follow you and then I eat everything that you guys leave.” They all laughed.

Faith made her way into the family room. She sat with her plate on her lap, sipped her tea and waited for the others. She felt the warmth of the fire and the love of her friends. Mercy popped in, followed closely by the guys. They ate for a long time. When Mercy offered desert, everybody begged for later. They were stuffed. Faith had carried the plates back to the kitchen.

The conversation had been light. Mercy knew Mick well. Usually in situations like this he would entertain everyone. Today he was reserved. She knew she could provoke him into gallantry, but she was more interested in what was on his heart. She studied him. Faith watched Mercy, partly because she felt odd looking at David. And David watched Faith and Mick. But everybody sensed that something was about to happen.

“Finally Mick stood up. I suggest we take a short break. Maybe we can stir around, clean up the kitchen and walk off some of this bounty. Then, maybe Darling, we could have some coffee, and I’d like to share something with you all.”

Faith and Mercy headed for the kitchen, but Mick beat them there. “Ladies have a seat, because the men will do the dishes.” There was a round of applause as Mick assumed the washing station.

But David reasoned, “If you wash, I have to put stuff away, and I don’t know where anything goes.”

“OK, who can argue with that, and he moved over, and David rolled up his sleeves and started washing the dishes.”

“I have an idea,” said Mick. “David, here with us are two of the finest voices in North America, and you can carry tenor. I’ll try to sing bass and we’ll do our best to keep these ladies company. Let’s do some quartet singing. And before anyone could protest, he broke out in a great old spiritual, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*. In a heartbeat the others jumped in to find their parts. They sang it through once or twice.

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan

And what did I see
 Coming for to carry me home
 A band of angels
 Coming after me
 Coming for to carry me home

Then Mick said, “Now watch me. When I point to you, you sing and everybody else hums his or her part. He pointed at Faith, and she beautifully started the melody in the first soprano octave. He kept his finger pointing at Faith and then pointed to himself. Then he pointed at Mercy and then David and then none and then all. They were having a great time. They burst into applause when he finally stopped the round.

“OK, now in unison,” and he started another old favorite,

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound
 And time shall be no more
 And the morning breaks eternal bright and fair

When the saved of earth are gathered
 Over on that other shore
 And the roll is called up yonder
 I’ll be there

When the roll is called up yonder
 When the roll is called up yonder
 When the roll is called up yonder
 When the roll is called up yonder
 I’ll be there

Then he made them sing it again, this time by his pointing. He had the guys sing the first stanza, the girls the second, and everybody singing parts on the chorus. He mixed and matched, and they were laughing and having a grand time.

It was dark outside. The storm was abating, the wind no longer howled.

Mick said, “Hey, let’s make that coffee and go back into the family room. I want to sit by the fire and listen to some music. I think David and I have done pretty well,” and the girls broke in with applause and whistles, “but we want to go in there and listen to two angels sing. Right, David?”

“Absolutely, Big Guy.”

The girls winked at each other, and Mercy said, “You guys check on the fire and give us time to make coffee and serve desert, and we’ll join you in a minute.”

After they left, Mercy said, "Isn't he great? See what I mean. Check your heart; see how you feel. I bet if you could get the man to admit it, he would tell you that he sensed he had withdrawn during dinner. That is why he came in here to wash the dishes, and that is why he started that silly and wonderful singing. He wanted us to be happy. He cares. And do you know what, we are happy and having a good time. And I think David is the same, just lacking experience. It takes a man time to learn how to love like Jesus loves. We must trust and support them as they learn to be men of God. But, believe me, it is worth the effort. This is not a one-time show for you and David. Mick carries on in some fashion for my pleasure all the time. He has won my heart a thousand times over. And sometimes, Faith, I know he's doing it, and I don't want to be joyful, and he knows it, and he makes me laugh anyway. How I love that man."

They took coffee and pie a la mode on trays into the family room. The guys had a dandy fire. They passed out the dessert, but before they could start to eat David said, "Please, I must prepare a toast."

And Mick said, with an amused smile, "By all means."

So David stood with his back to the fire and said,

Let me tell you a story
About my new friends three
They've taught me how to live
As blessed as can be

First there's Mick the Man of God
Heart of purest gold
With God's great men
His story will be told

And Mercy Magnificent
Compassionate you see
Sister, friend and love
Created helpmeet to be

Beautiful Elizabeth
New friend now to me
A gem of God's own making
Unique and precious, she

I love you one and all
I love you each one too
I thank the God of heaven

For brethren such as you

They burst into applause. Faith was warmed by his words. He knew her middle name and called her beautiful. Did he really think so? Her face flushed and she glanced down at the floor. She could feel Mercy's eyes burning and looked up to a knowing wink and smile. They laughed.

Mick said, "David, you bard, that was wonderful."

David said, "It must have been the snowball Faith creamed me with." They laughed.

"Let's eat," said the big guy. And they did.

They made light conversation as they ate dessert. Mercy said, "David, that was an excellent toast. Have you always been poetic?"

David tried to pass it off, but Mercy persisted, so he said, "When I was a boy I used to write poetry. But it got lost in the swirl of tax accounting and the struggles of life. But you guys have inspired me all the way to my boots."

"Bravo," said Mercy. "Now don't let that be the last we hear. In fact, I think you should seriously consider writing songs."

"Me too," said Mick. "Anyone who can express his feelings so well, so fast, could be of real service to the church by capturing the splendor of the Lord in verse."

"Here, here," said Faith. "We could sing them as a road troupe." They laughed again.

Earlier Mick had turned on the floodlight outside the family room window. They could see a white blanket and from time to time a flake flash as it blew past the light.

"Looks like the storm has stopped. What time is it, David?"

"It's 8:02."

They were quiet for a few minutes, lost in their own thoughts. Then Mick said, "Okay, how about that angelic music we want to hear. Who's going to play?"

Mercy said, "You hear me all the time. Faith, please play for us."

She smiled at them and got up and took a seat at the piano. She was still for a minute, her fingers resting on the keys. She worshipped the Lord in her heart, then began to play. The music was clear and precise; it had an aura of peace from the anointing of the Spirit. She played the song through, and then began to sing softly to the Lord,

Oh Lord my God when I in awesome wonder consider
 All the worlds Thy hands have made, I see the stars, I hear the rolling
 Thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed,

But when she reached the Refrain her voice burst into brilliance. It filled the room,

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee,
 How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
 Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee,
 How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

It was breathless. Nobody moved. A daughter of the King worshipped her God. She softly sang the second verse, and the third. And then she came to the last. Her voice rang out with the words,

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me
 Home, what joy shall fill my heart! Then I shall bow in humble
 Adoration and there proclaim my God how great Thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee,
 How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
 Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee,
 How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

It was electrifying. David felt the hair stand up on his neck. He couldn't keep back the tears. Mick was on his feet praising God. Mercy sat on the love seat singing praises to her Lord in the Spirit. And Faith sat at the piano, silent, hands and face raised in adoration of her Redeemer.

Then she played another old favorite,

When peace like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like
 Sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
 It is well; it is well with my soul.

It is well with my soul
 It is well it is well with my soul.

The guys joined on the echo in the refrain. They sang in parts. Mercy began to sing the alto. The blend was smooth. Each sang with abandon; the vocal quality was very good. But it didn't matter. They sang to worship, not to please. But it was rich and rewarding. From this song they branched onto others. Mercy also played. Both girls sang solos, the men, in-group.

Mick's Heavy Burden

Finally Mick said, "That was wonderful. Now let us pray. And before we do, I want to share a burden."

Mercy thought, 'Now I shall see what troubles the man.'

"The Lord sent David to bring me a message. It deals with the same thing I've been concerned about for some time; but I was having trouble separating the traditions of men from the Word of God. I'd bought in to too many practices to be able to see clearly where we had gone astray. David missed most of that since his training was from the Spirit-quickened Word. He wasn't influenced by our doctrines. But now I have a somber responsibility which I am uncertain how to perform. I must test these matters against the Word and then carry them to the church. And only the Lord knows what the outcome will be. Much of today I've felt like a tired old man. I just wanted to go off somewhere and lay down. Maybe retire. But your fellowship has lifted me to a new dedication. I will, by the grace of God, and the help of my Darling wife (and you, Faith and David) see this through like the man I'm supposed to be. But tonight, I need your prayers. In fact, I want you to anoint me with oil and consecrate me for this task. I ask you to lay hands on me and pray that the will of God be accomplished through me one more time."

Mercy went to the mantle and picked up the flask of anointing oil and handed it to David. Mick knelt on the floor by the fireplace and David stood in front of him. Mercy and Faith knelt behind Mick and laid their hands on his shoulders.

David removed the stopper and poured oil on his fingers. He formed a cross on Mick's forehead, "Mick, we anoint you in the name of Jesus and consecrate you to this work the Lord has given you to do." He put the stopper back in the flask and set the oil on the mantle. He walked back to Mick and laid both hands on his head. And they began to pray. They prayed in the Spirit, and they prayed with understanding. They prayed softly and they yelled out loud. They prayed for some time, but then, slowly a peace began to settle upon them all. As he stood in that peace, David heard the same still voice that had spoken to him down by the pond, and he began to prophesy,

My son, I have called you to this work
and I will be with you in it.
Fear not what they will do to you,
only be strong and lean on Me.
For I shall accomplish My purposes,
and you shall find rest for your soul."

With that, the Lord's presence gently lifted. They were still for a while, quietly enjoying His peace.

“Thank you,” said Mick as he got to his feet. He and David helped the girls up. Mick gave them each a big hug, and said, “We need to get to bed. We’ve had a big day.”

“Mercy said, “Go ahead Darling. I’ll be along as soon as I wash the dessert dishes.”

“But Faith said, “Oh no, Mrs. Might.., Mercy. Go to bed. I will clean up the kitchen.”

“I’ll help. I’d like to spend time with Faith if that’s OK,” and he looked for her approval.

She said, “I’d love your company.”

“Good. You get to bed,” said David. “By the way, what are we doing for church tomorrow, Mick?”

“We’ll worship here due to the weather. You or I will preach. We’ll have a blessed time. Okay?”

“Sounds perfect, as long as you do the preaching.”

With that Mick put his arm around Mercy and they walked down the hall.

Proposal

Faith made fresh dishwater and they quickly finished the dishes.

“This has been a terrific day, hasn’t it, Faith?”

“It has been lovely. One of the greatest blessings of my life has been to work for Dr. Metano and to get to know him and Mercy. They are like parents and friends. I’ve not had much fun here, except for my work, and for my darling little Sunday school class.”

“Mick told me that you were teaching 5-year-olds. That must be special.”

“It is David. They are so honest and transparent. They give their love so freely; and they have great faith to believe in Jesus. They are a source of pleasure to me. I’ll miss them tomorrow.”

“It’s probable that church will be canceled, right?”

“Yes. The church is rural and on a winding mountain road. It’s beautiful; but not safe on ice. And it will be good to hear Dr. Metano, or you, preach. I don’t hear him much, and you never.”

“Well, it will be him. To tell you the truth, I’ve never preached before.”

“I find that hard to believe. Why not?”

“Until now, I’ve been very quiet in the church.”

“I don’t understand. The work I typed was deep and anointed. I can’t imagine you being quiet or intimidated in the church.”

“I’m embarrassed to confess, I was.”

“What changed?”

As they finished the dishes, David said, “Would you mind if we go back to the fire?”

She said, “I was hoping you’d want to do that.”

“Great. Well, anyway...” and as they walked back into the family room David told her about the dream and the Lord sending him to teach. He told her the whole story. She was full of empathy when she heard they had kicked him out of the church. She was involved in all that he said.

He told how God sent him to meet Mick, and how, at first, he expected it to be hard. He told her how much he'd come to admire him; and, as icing on the cake, his pleasure in meeting her.

Finally he was able to turn the conversation around.

"Now, I want to hear about you. Who are you? What do you want?"

She laughed. "I came here to go to college. My major was music. Somehow, I fancied, now promise you won't laugh," and she stopped until he promised, "now remember, you promised," and he held up his hand in promise again, "I thought the Lord told me to come here and that He was going to send His man to be my husband."

She looked at him earnestly. He didn't smile; in fact, he didn't think it was funny. He said, "You must have been very disappointed."

His understanding touched her. She opened her heart further, sensing she could trust this gentle man. "Yes, I was hurt. I knew that God didn't make a mistake; but I was troubled to discover that I could, and in fact had, and on such an important matter. After that, I hung around a couple of years doing odd jobs and singing with the school. I had just decided I needed to get on with my life, and was trying to figure out what to do, when I heard that the new Overseer was looking for a secretary. I thought that, if I could get the job, it might give me time to work on an emerging passion in my life. So I interviewed, and fortunately, was chosen. I've now worked for him almost five years."

"During this time he and Mercy have loved me and helped me grow in faith. Sometimes they have me over for weekends, under the guise of my helping Dr. Metano on some *important* project. Usually we work for an hour or so and spend the rest like we've just done."

"That's kind of them," he said, "but it goes both ways. You are a blessing to be around, and your music so anointed and pleasant."

"Thank you. That's been my prayer since I was small. I love the Lord and I love to sing to Him."

"So, what is this emerging passion?"

Again she marveled to herself. She mentioned that just once and here he was urging her to spill her heart. 'Could he be? Oh God, could this be the man You promised?' she whispered silently.

And she heard a still small voice, 'This is the man.'

She was dumbfounded. She listened for Him to speak again, but there was only silence. Could this be? Her heart surged with excitement, and then with fear!

“Faith? Faith?” David reached over and shook her arm.

“What? Oh David, I’m sorry. What did you say?”

“You silly,” he said, and whacked her with a stuffed pillow.

“Why you,” and she began looking around for a weapon.

He grabbed her, “Oh no you don’t. That just makes up for the snowball.”

They laughed, and she said, “OK, we’re even.”

“What I said was, ‘Tell me about your emerging passion.’”

“Well...” she said, but she drifted off again. Was that the Lord? It was the Lord, wasn’t it? Her stomach was in her throat. It was wonderful; it was terrifying.

“Faith, are you all right?”

“David. David! Excuse me. Could you excuse me? I need to powder my nose.”

He laughed. “OK. See you in a few minutes.” She was more delightful that he could have imagined.

She felt like laughing, like crying. This was so exciting. Yet there was no one to talk to except *him*. And she couldn’t talk to him about this. But he was quite a man. She’d never experienced anything like this. There’d been lots of guys after her, but they were not like David. He wasn’t even interested in her; or was he? She didn’t know. She wanted to wake Mercy. She needed someone to talk to, but there was only *him*. Maybe she would tell him good night; that she was tired. But no, this man David Lameman fascinated her.

She walked back to the fire. She had to know.

“Hey, welcome back. Sorry I roughed you up.”

She said, “I deserved it.”

“So tell me, ‘What’s on your mind?’”

She froze. Her heart stopped. “What?”

“You know. What is the growing passion?”

“Oh,” and she let out a sigh of relief.

She took a deep breath and said, “I’ve become more and more burdened to feed the poor and hungry. The world is full of starving people, and I want to do something about it. So, during the last few years, especially since working for Dr. Metano, I have been studying advanced methods of growing vegetables. I even have my own green house. It’s very interesting.”

“That’s terrific. So where are you in the project?”

“The Israelis have made significant advances in the science of hydroponics farming. I have been studying all the publications I can find. In addition, I am in correspondence with a retired professor from the University of Georgia who has done some excellent work in this area. He has a system that doesn’t require constant checking of pH, nor does it require complex, expensive computer control of nutrients as did earlier hydroponics methods. And it requires only half the nutrients and about 15 percent of the water of older methods. It provides abundant, high-quality vegetables. We think we will also be able to harvest rice in this manner for the Asian nations.”

“It sounds like you’re making excellent progress. What’s next?”

“I felt the first task was to master the discipline. What I really need is spend a year or so studying and working in an advanced center. And then I need the capital and opening from the Lord to go. But I am preparing for that goal.”

“Faith, that’s great. Surely the Lord will open the doors to see this dream prosper.”

“Do you really think so, David?”

“Yes, I really do. Let me get some more wood, and I’ll tell you why.”

“While you do that, could I fix another cup of cider, or perhaps, coffee? Which would you like?”

“I’d prefer coffee right now.”

“Coffee it is.”

“I take mine black. I’ll grab some wood and get this fire roused back to life.”

He went out without gloves, coat or hat. He didn’t stay long.

“Burr. It is cold out there,” he said as he came back in through the kitchen. “Want to bundle up and go for another walk?”

“I might take you up on that after a cup of coffee.”

He went in and stoked the fire. She followed in a bit with fresh coffee.

“Now you were going to tell me why you think my dream may be fulfilled.”

“OK, but you promise not to laugh.”

She laughed.

“Hey,” he said and picked up the pillow again and threatened her with it.

“I didn’t promise, yet” and she still laughed.

He whacked her with the pillow. This time she could not be denied. She found another pillow and the fight commenced. She darted around behind him and flailed away. He lunged over the chair and tackled her. And they burst out laughing on the floor.

“Good grief, you’re a crazy woman,” he said as he helped her up. “Now come over here and sit down and let me tell you something exciting.”

She came over and sat beside him, leaned her head back on the chair and closed her eyes. “I’m all ears.” They laughed at that thought.

David said, “About a year ago one of my clients asked me to look into the financial aspects of a fish farm he was considering. In order to give good advice, I studied the available literature. It turns out that I recommended against the venture, not because fish farming was a bad idea, but the proposal was for a site in the United States. Negative factors included such things as high costs for domestic labor and facilities; a climate that required significant facilities and water heating; lack of fresh water sources; and the high risk associated with environmental and regulatory issues.”

“But I was interested, because fish farming is becoming vital as the world’s ocean treasures are being depleted by contamination and violation of spawning areas, and things like that. In addition, small fishermen will be the first to fail, because the super trawlers are putting them out of business.”

“I know a brother who established a fish farm at a church in Mexico. He found a good location and church. There is plenty of fresh water. I think he is on the right track, but I’d like to see him be more scientific. I am also aware that the Israelis are the world’s leaders in aquaculture technology.”

“That’s exciting, David. I, too, have done some reading about fish farming, and have wondered about combining the two. Some work is being done to integrate them at the University of Arizona. I plan to catch up on their research.”

They drank their coffee and looked into the fire.

Finally David spoke again. “You know, Faith, I’ve been thinking about what the Lord might have for me to do. For years I’ve had a successful business as a tax accountant. I have a comfortable base of good clients. I work from my home and use the computer at a pretty sophisticated level. I’m set up so that I can take care of my business from almost anywhere in the world through the Internet and things like that. I’ve also made, and invested, quite a bit of money. For a long time I thought I’d recruit a junior partner with the idea of training and ultimately selling the business.”

“But the question always remained, ‘What would I do next’? I don’t have a family and, until recent events, never considered myself remotely able to minister for the Lord. Oh, I’ve always loved His word, and studied it thousands of hours, but I was ‘just a layman,’ and a crippled one at that.”

She winced, but knew he was speaking from his heart. She just watched his face and listened.

“But the same God who established Gideon (who was hiding and beating out wheat in the wine press) and David (who was keeping his father’s sheep) can do it again. He appeared to me, sent me to teach His word, and empowered me to go.”

“Once this business with Mick is finished, I’m going to set out to teach the Gospel. My heart is drawn to Latin America but above that, I’m uncertain.”

“And” he continued, “it has always made sense to me to teach the Lord’s children how to take of the bread of life, both the Heavenly Manna, Jesus Himself, and also food for their bodies.”

And he stopped talking.

Faith was breathless. “David, that’s beautiful.”

He stood up, offered her both hands, pulled her up and said, “Come, walk with me.”

They went to the hall closet and bundled under coats, scarves, gloves, rubbers for Faith and a hat for David. He took her hand, and they went out through the kitchen and garage. They walked awhile. It was still and cold. The night had cleared, and the moon played beautifully on the snow and trees and road. They could hear the crunch of their steps on the road.

“This is breathtaking, David. It’s beautiful.”

They reached a place where the trees broke along the road edge, and they could see down into the valley. There he stopped. He put his arm around her, and they looked into the valley for a moment. Then he turned her to face himself and he took off his hat.

“You may think me mad, but please, let me speak. I have fallen in love with you. You have smitten my heart. I cannot think of living without you. I ask you; I beseech you, marry me, Faith. Will you please marry me?”

She was stunned. She almost fainted. This was so beautiful, so unreal; so terrifying. She looked at the man. She wanted to run; she wanted to sing out, ‘Yes, my Darling Champion, Yes! Yes! A thousand times yes.’ But she couldn’t speak.

He continued, “I know this is too sudden. I know a beautiful woman like you can do better, but you’ll never find a man who will love and cherish you the way I will. I will care for you, honor you, and love you. I will give myself for you as Christ gave Himself for His bride. I...”

She put her finger over his mouth and said, “Hush, my Darling. You’ve won my heart. Yes. Yes, I’ll marry you and follow you to the ends of the earth.”

“You will marry me? Oh glory. I never thought you could possibly say yes. But I had to ask. My heart would have burst if I let this moment pass. You are so beautiful, so wonderful, and I ...”

Again, she hushed him and began to sing

God sent me you
A man of God are you
He promised to send His man
And here are you

I’ll love you
I’ll serve you
With all my heart

And he joined in

I’ll love you

And she echoed

I’ll love you

And he sang

I’ll serve you

And she echoed

I’ll serve you

And they sang together

With all my heart.

He kissed her there in the moonlight.

“I love you, my Darling.”

“I love you, my Darling,” she echoed.

“Are you cold?”

“I don’t know. I’m warm all over. I’m bubbling. I’m so happy.”

He kissed her again. “Let’s go back.” They walked and sang and laughed and kissed.

“You know,” he said, “I don’t know how to tell Mick. He may throw me out for stealing the World’s Best Secretary.” They laughed and laughed.

“How I love Mercy,” she said. “You know, she said some things to me today about the way Mick loves her that prepared my heart to be able to say yes to you on the spot. I knew that oneness in the Lord between a man and his wife is a beautiful thing, but I always was afraid about giving myself to a husband. But she made it sound so right. I love you, David. And I trust you and I entrust myself and my life into your hands.”

“Faith, I will submit myself to God and to seek Him with all my heart as long as I live. I will submit myself to His Word; and work with Him as He conforms me into the image of Jesus our Lord. And as I grow in Him, I will love you better and more purely as the years go by. I will nurture and cherish you as a rare and beautiful flower.”

“Because I know that is true, David, therefore have I surrendered my heart to you.”

He kissed her one more time as they turned into the driveway. They did not know that Dr. Metano had come out in pajamas and robe to see if anyone was still up. He peered through the window just as they kissed in the moonlight in the drive. He whistled the old song, *Glory to God, Hallelujah*, and went back to bed.

They unbundled by the fire. “To answer your question, David, Yes, I am freezing.”

He held her there in front of the embers for a minute. “Are you feeling warmer?”

“Yes,” she said.

“It’s time for bed.” He walked her down the hall to her room and kissed her gently at the door.

“Good night, my Darling.”

“Good night, my love.” She reached into the room, turned on the light and faced him again. She put her hand on his shoulder, kissed him on the cheek and said, “I love you. See you in the morning.”

“I love you.”

She closed the door and danced her way to the shower. “What a wonderful God you are,” she said. “And I shall praise you all the days of my life.” After her shower she put on her flannel pajamas and jumped in the bed like she did when she was a little girl. “Thank you Father, thank you, thank you.” Her mind raced as she climbed under the covers. She didn’t expect to sleep for all the excitement, but the fatigue of the day was upon her. She was soon fast asleep.

David walked back down the hall to check the fire one more time. For the first time, he looked at his watch. It was almost 2:30. He bowed on his knees before his God. “Lord You have provided me a wife of rare beauty and kindness beyond anything I could have hoped or imagined. Thank you, Lord, for Your blessing and favor.”

He turned out the lights and climbed the stairs. It was a hot shower and bed for David. As he pulled up the covers he heard the Lord say, “You shall preach for me My son, starting tomorrow.” He fell asleep immediately.

David’s First Sermon

Mick was up as usual at 6:00. He looked out the window, but it was too dark to see. The glass felt cold. He dressed quietly in the bathroom as he always did. Mercy was buried under the blankets with one eye open. She knew he was up. She usually took a catnap after he left and then got up and fixed breakfast. Mick knew she was awake; he stopped by the bed on his way out and said, “Darling, just fix coffee when you get up. Let’s let our guests sleep awhile this morning before breakfast.”

She said, “OK, Honey” and turned over in the covers.

Mick walked humbly before the Lord. It was his custom to praise and worship and then to pray along the general guidance of the Lord’s Prayer. He especially enjoyed Sundays, because even though he often preached, he had learned to rest in the Lord. It was his practice to do nothing on Sunday but go to church, rest and worship God.

But today was different. He struggled with the burden. How was he to proceed? How could he prevail on the Counsel? How could he get the word to the local churches?

As he walked he poured out his heart. Gradually peace settled over him. He remembered a story in *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*.¹⁶ It was about a mistake Taylor made that almost cost him his life and ministry. The financial provision for 200 missionaries in China flowed through him. The burden was great. Taylor was constantly worrying about missionaries who lacked money for food and shelter. He was breaking under the strain. Finally, the Lord spoke to him: "Whose Mission is this?" Taylor quickly replied, "It is Your Mission, Lord." The clincher followed. "If it is My Mission, don't you think I am able to take care of it? If it is My Mission, why do you worry?" Taylor had to laugh at his folly. And the burden shifted to the One who is able. Taylor was responsible for praying and waiting on the Lord, but he was servant, not owner. From that point he walked in peace, and God prospered the Mission for many years. That was his spiritual secret.

The story flooded Mick's memory. "Lord, I understand. I'll walk each day in your light. And I will do what you tell me. The results I leave to You."

Then the Lord said, "I will speak to you through David this morning."

It was a buoyed Mick Metano that praised his way back to the house.

At 7:30 Mercy met him in the kitchen. It was warm and smelled like fresh coffee.

"Good morning, Darling. How are you?"

"Good morning my big, brave husband. Isn't it too cold to be out there?"

"No. The wind is calm. It's as beautiful as a picture. It is crisp. I thought of you and wished you were there with me—except with a little portable heater, of course."

"Since it will be a while until breakfast, do you think that you might have room for a little piece of pie?" she said with a twinkle in her eye.

"Sweetheart, you know how to charm a man, don't you? Thank you very much."

"Coming up, and I'll warm it up a bit."

"I think I'll build a fire this morning, especially since we'll have church here, and then I want to tell you something exciting and special."

"I'll be in there by the time you're ready."

¹⁶ Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission.

He built a fire, and she brought the snack. They thanked the Lord and then he said, “I’ve had a funny feeling about Faith and David. I thought they were going to become good friends, but I think it might be more than that.”

“I know what you mean. They really did seem to hit it off yesterday, with that silly horse play in the snow, etc.”

“Well, I woke up last night after 2:00. I decided to check the fire and see if our guests were still up. I noticed David’s door was still open as was Faith’s. They weren’t around so I chanced to look out the front window, and guess what I saw?”

“They were out for a walk?” she asked.

“So they were. And that’s not all. They were on their way back, and right out there on the drive way, probably the same place where I’ve been known to steal a kiss from you, my Darling, our young friends did the same.”

“Mick, that’s wonderful. It’s so exciting. I can hardly wait until they get up. I wonder how this friendship will develop.”

“So do I, Darling. Anyway, there is no telling what time they got to sleep, so I thought we would call them around 9:00 if they are not up before that. Maybe we could plan breakfast at 9:30 and start our worship after that. OK?”

“Sounds perfect to me. How about fried eggs, bacon and toast this morning?”

“Fine. Maybe you want to dress for the day. I’m going to look at the Word for a while. Then I’ll shower and dress and call David. Maybe you can call Faith.”

But David didn’t need Mick’s call. He was up early. He felt that the Lord had given him something to share that morning, so he had been studying for almost two hours at the small table in his room. He heard Mick and Mercy moving around, but really didn’t want to see them until he finished studying and had a chance to see Faith.

His time with her seemed like a dream. Did she really say she would marry him? Could he be so fortunate? He sat, re-living the evening. She was more than he could have imagined. And she loved him. He snapped back to reality. He was studying God’s Word. The essence of the message was clear. He just needed to speak with the Lord’s anointing. He knew that the Holy Spirit is the Teacher of the Bible, and so he prayed again, “Lord, I pray that You open Your Word this morning. Speak to our hearts. Teach us that we might understand and obey. No man is worthy to speak for you. I humbly ask You to quicken me this day that I might speak words of truth.”

With that he went down the stairs. No one was in the kitchen, so he stood at the kitchen door and looked down the hallway to Faith's room. He wanted to knock on her door. In fact he started down the hall, but then heard voices in the room. It sounded like Mercy and Faith laughing. He lost his nerve and went in to the family room. A fire was burning brightly. The room was empty, but warm. He walked into the kitchen, poured a cup of coffee and went back to the family room. He opened the curtain and looked out at the blanket of snow. It was beautiful. He sat down, picked up his Bible and again turned to 1 Kings 18. He read the story again. He marveled at the manifesting of God's power through Elijah. He was still reading the text when Mick came in.

"Mornin', David."

"Good morning. How are you?"

"Great. I see you found the coffee. We decided to let our guests sleep in this morning." Mick had a silly grin. Then he said, "David, I think you are to speak this morning. Has the Lord told you?"

"Yes, Mick. He laid some Scriptures on my heart, and even though I would rather hear you preach, it looks like I am going to be the one."

"Great," said Mick. "I can hardly wait."

They had started to talk when Mercy entered. She had a wonderful smile. She walked over to David and kissed him on the forehead. "May the Lord bless you," she said.

David was taken back. Had Faith told Mercy? What did Mercy think? Did Mick know, too?

Mercy said, "Faith will be along shortly. We just had a fun talk. You guys must be ready for some breakfast. Let me get it started."

She popped back out of the room while David was trying to figure out how to ask her just what she and Faith had discussed.

David looked at Mick, who just shrugged.

Mick sat there with a silly grin but said nothing; he just kept smiling.

Finally David could stand it no longer. It seemed like everybody knew a secret but him. He said, "Mick, I'm afraid I made a fool of myself last night. I fell in love with Faith so completely that I couldn't help myself: I asked her to marry me. I know it happened too fast, but I am glad I did. Mick, she said, 'Yes'. It is so good I can hardly stand it. Imagine, Faith is willing to marry me!"

“Glory to God. That’s wonderful!” said the big guy. And then he started to laugh; and so did David. They roared. “Glory to God. Glory to God.”

Mercy heard them in the kitchen. She started laughing, too, and crying at the same time. She could still see Faith in her mind’s eye as she knocked on her door this morning. Faith had invited her into the room. The child was lying in her bed with a huge smile and wonderful glow on her face. She had said, “Mercy, David asked me to marry him last night, and I said ‘Yes.’ Can you believe it? It is like a dream come true. God has kept His promise to me, His little child. I am so thankful and so excited that I can hardly breathe. I can’t wait to see my prince this morning. I hope so much that he preaches for us. I love him; I know in my heart that he is a man of God. That is all I’ve ever wanted. To share my life with a man who loves the Lord more than anything else in the world.”

Mercy went over and sat on the bed and stroked her hair, “It’s the Lord, my child. God has answered your prayer.” Then she laughed. “Tell me everything! What happened?”

And Faith told her in one gush of joy. They laughed until stillness settled over them. Mercy said, “Faith, I think we should pray.”

She got out of bed, and they knelt together. Mercy laid her hand on Faith’s shoulder and prayed that the Lord consecrate their unity. She prayed that Faith might bring love and softness to the marriage; and that they might quickly become one. There was joy and peace in the room when she left. Faith was to dress and come to breakfast. She sang and worshipped as she dressed. She was so excited she felt she might burst.

David, trying to talk to Mick, was so distracted that Mick said, “I’m going to talk to Mercy,” and he left in false disgust. David stood by the doorway. He looked down the hall to *her* room. And waited. In a few moments, the door opened and there she was. Faith was beautiful. She had on a soft green flannel shirt and a pair of jeans. She saw him and they smiled as they hurried down the hallway. He took her hands and said, “Good morning. You are beautiful. I love you.” And he kissed her.

She said, “Good Morning, my love. I love you.”

He held her for a moment and kissed her again. Then they walked into the kitchen. Mick kissed her on the forehead and gave her a fatherly hug. “God has been good to my little one, hasn’t He?”

She looked him in the eye and said, “God has blessed me.”

Breakfast was more joyful than ever. David and Faith had not had time to decide when the wedding would be, but they knew who the preacher and Matron of Honor would be.

Breakfast passed quickly. They adjourned to the family room and worshipped and sang for some time. Mick told them the Lord said that David was to speak, that he had a word for them all, especially him. He also told them the Lord had affirmed it to David.

When the time came, Mick said to David, “Brother, tell us what the Lord has said.”

David stood between the window and the fireplace. Mick had set up a music stand, and David put his Bible on it. He began by saying, “Let us pray.” And David asked again for the Lord’s anointing on the preaching of the word.

And he started. He reviewed the wickedness of the reign of Ahab and Jezebel and the Lord’s anointing of Elijah. He reviewed acts Elijah performed at the Lord’s word. It was clear that David knew the story of God’s children. He spoke as if he knew Elijah personally, as if he had been with him when he called fire down from heaven to consume the captains of fifty and their men; and as he had mercy on the third captain and his men. The text seemed to live as he described the conflict with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the Asherah. They could feel Elijah’s anger as he challenged the false prophets; and the power of his faith as he built an altar to the Lord.

Faith watched David, transfixed. He was to be her husband. She prayed silently, “Oh may I be for him good all the days of his life; may I bless him and be as a fruitful vine at his side.”

Mick greatly enjoyed the message. But he had a prayer on his heart, “Father, let me hear clearly what You will say to me through Your servant.”

The content of David’s message began to change. He described the relationship between God and Elijah. He talked about Elijah’s failure to stand against the spirit of the enemy that was on Jezebel; that same spirit that had been on Goliath when the armies of Israel had cowered before it in the valley of Elah, until David, anointed by a Greater Spirit, stood up and smote the giant. He talked about Elijah’s fear and that he had run from the woman. And he told of God’s mercy and the sending of the angel, twice to feed his servant for the journey that lay before him. He told of how God had refreshed His servant, anointed him and used him greatly after his failure.

David made it clear that God was the initiator; that He was aware of where Elijah was and what he needed; that God brought forth what He wanted through His servant, and then when the time was right, took him home in a fiery chariot.

Mick began to draw strength from the word. It was as if the angel had touched him that morning and said, “Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you.”

David prayed a simple prayer and sat down by Faith. It was quiet. All three hearers were lost in what the Lord ministered to them from the anointed Word. She leaned her head on his shoulder and whispered, “That was wonderful.” He kissed her hand.

Mick said, “Faith, sing us one more song.” She went to the piano, sat for a minute and then began to play and softly sing a song that she knew was one of Mick’s favorites,

O safe to the rock that is higher than I
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly
So sinful so weary, Thine own would I be;
Thou blessed Rock of Ages; I’m hiding in Thee.

Hiding in Thee, Hiding in Thee,
Thou Blessed Rock of Ages
I’m Hiding in Thee.

She looked at Mick and Mercy and David. They all had their eyes closed. They were worshipping God. Tears ran down Mick’s face.

She sang the third verse,

How oft in the conflict, when press’d by the foe,
I have fled to my refuge and breath’d out my woe;
How often when trials like sea billows roll, Have I
Hidden in Thee, O Thou Rock of my soul.

Hiding in Thee, Hiding in Thee,
Thou Blessed Rock of Ages
I’m hiding in Thee.

They began to sing, and they sang for an hour or so. Finally, they were quiet. There was great peace in the room. Mick said, “I propose naps for everyone, or at least, a nap for us. Then after we rest we can get back together for dinner.”

Mercy said, “That is exactly what I want to do.”

Plans for the Future

Faith and David smiled. David said, “Oh no, we want to spend the afternoon together. We must talk; and maybe even take another walk. After all, it has been several hours since we were out in the cold.” They all laughed.

Mick and Mercy got up. They hugged the children. Mick said, “David, that was an outstanding message, **for just a layman...**” They all laughed. “God has spoken to me through you, His servant.”

“Blessed be His name for ever more,” said David.

Mick and Mercy headed for their Sunday afternoon nap, like they'd been doing for almost fifty years. Faith and David reached for the other's hand. They sat on the love seat in front of the fire.

"David, that was a fine sermon. It seemed that you were a personal friend of Elijah."

"Thank you so much. It makes me feel really good to know you approve. I think of the men and women of the Scriptures are close friends. I've studied their lives many times. Sometimes I feel they are closer than my associates at home."

"You must have been lonely."

"Well maybe, but I never thought about it like that. I just felt pretty much like an outsider. And I kept to myself mostly."

"That is so hard for me to understand. You are witty and charming. You sing so well, you are compassionate, and you know the Word as well as my hero, Dr. Metano..."

He kissed her while she was talking. "Hush, precious one." And he kissed her again.

"I cannot believe my good fortune. How such a one as you is willing to share your life with me. It is a mercy from God beyond my wildest dreams. Stand up and let me look at you." And he pulled her to her feet against her laughing protest. "You are so lovely," he said as he spun her slowly around; "and yet, your outward beauty is but a mirror of the grace and purity of your heart."

"She came up to him and said, 'You melt me with your words.'"

He kissed her again and said, "You make me dizzy."

They sat down and David began to speak, "I know an Israeli consulting firm. Why don't I make an appointment for us. We can, if you like, talk to them about you studying with them in Israel. We can live on a Kibbutz while you study vegetable farming and maybe on another for fish farming. I can run my business from almost anywhere and can travel to my clients when necessary. As you master technology, we can be praying about where the Lord will send us. We can retain the Israelis to develop an integrated system and maybe even follow us to install and make sure it will do what it should. Then you can take it from there. I will teach the Bible and you teach them how to feed themselves. Our goal will be to nurture a healthy church and then move on to another location and start again. How does that sound?"

"David, that's wonderful. But it would cost so much money."

"Darling, I make a lot of money, and I have a couple of million dollars invested already. Besides, the Lord is our source. If our money runs out, His won't."

“Well David, when do we start?”

“How about next week?”

She almost snapped her neck turning to look at him.

“Just joking,” he said. “But really, the sooner the better. What do you think of taking a month or so for our honeymoon? We could go to Israel. And then, when we’re ready, we could call the consultants and meet with them over there. You could actually ‘kick the tires’ so to speak.”

“David, you keep me breathless. Yes. Yes. I would love to do exactly what you said. In fact, there is nothing I would rather do. That’s a perfect plan. Did you read my mind?”

“No, but your Lord Jesus knows your heart. And He is my God. It will be exciting serving Him together as long as He gives us time to share.”

He continued, “Darling, I know I have rushed you. But I cannot think of living without you. When can we get married? How soon can you be ready?”

“David, I can’t breathe. I’m whirling.”

“I’m sorry, my love. Here, I’ll sit in the other chair so you can cool off.” He moved over to the big stuffed chair by the window.

She laughed and got up and followed him. She sat in his lap. “I missed you,” she said and gave him a kiss. “Could you give me a month to prepare?”

“A month? I was thinking of how lonely I would be for a week.”

“Three weeks?”

“Two was the most I could possible imagine.”

She jumped up and grabbed a pillow and whacked him.

“OK. OK. I have a compromise. Want to hear it?”

She said, “OK. Tell me what it is Bub, but remember, I got you covered,” and she stood over him with the pillow cocked over her shoulder.

Doing his best to keep a straight face he said, “Let’s wake Mick and Mercy and do it now.”

She whacked him again. He tackled her to the floor. He kissed her and then sat up. You intoxicate me. I cannot move.” Then he said, “You can have a month, but not a second more. Let’s go take a walk,” and he pulled her to her feet.

They walked, talked, sang, prayed and kissed. They decided to ask Mick to do a small service. Then they would fly to New York, spend a couple of days and then fly to Israel for an extended honeymoon and study. Faith would stop working as soon as they finished the paper. Then she would spend the rest of the time until the wedding preparing for a new life with the man God sent.

Part 4 – PostScript and Final Note

David and Faith were married in the company of Mishpat and Mercy and a small gathering of Faith's friends. Mick presided. Diko and Grace stood with them. A beautiful wedding, it was obvious that God's blessing was upon the couple.

After David and Faith left for Israel, Mick, in an impassioned, eloquent address, called the national council to reformation. But, his warning was unheeded, Mick was charged with error and dismissed. Laos became Overseer; the denomination rolled on, satisfied that it was a Biblical church, unmindful of Mick's ringing words:

Unless you repent, you risk being spewed out by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Failing at the national level, Mick tried to carry the message to the local churches, but a well-oiled machine preceded him, thwarted his efforts and even withdrew his right to speak to the congregations at all. As a last resort, he converted the manuscript to a book he called, *David's Story*. He prayed that many would read it, see the apostasy, seek the living God themselves, and work for change in the church.

After he'd done everything he could, Mick waited before the Lord, who said, *let them alone: blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

[As the story winds down, let me restate a point Mick made to the Council. Seeing that they couldn't refute him by Scripture, one said, "Mick, you take too much upon yourself, and place too much on us. Let's face it: this is the Lord's church. Only He is big enough to fix it. Why don't you come over here, sit down and rest? We've worked too long and hard to let a few points of doctrine come between us. Besides, more pious and intelligent men than we have debated these things without resolution. So why do you think you're right? Please, Mick, don't let something this small divide us. Please."

Mick's answer was stunning. We should consider it carefully.

He said, "Matt, my old friend, you're right in that you and I and others here today have labored together for a long time. I prize you and them. It's with a heavy heart that I speak. I call for reformation, not separation. I say we must examine ourselves to make sure we're in the faith; I say we've drifted and that it will be unacceptable in *that day* to say, 'But Lord, we meant well.' He will tell those who persisted in their own way to depart from Him. He will say they were a law unto themselves, doing what they chose, not what He commanded."

He continued, "You won't like this, but over and over the Lord rebuked the *religious* for clinging to their traditions. When they refused to repent, He left

them in their sin. They neither knew nor cared when His Spirit passed them by. The Kingdom of God came to them, but because of their rebellion, moved on. This didn't happen just to the Jews: the same was foretold to the churches and has come to pass exactly as He said it would.

It is a serious mistake to hope that the Lord is going to say or do more than He has already said and done. The price was paid; the Word given. Those with ears to hear will hear what the Spirit says to the churches. They will repent and seek and love and obey Him. The lukewarm will be spewed out. He said so Himself. Only those who are ready will He *keep from the hour of trial that shall come upon the earth, to test those who dwell upon the earth.*

Who knows? Perhaps the five foolish virgins represent a class of *believers* like the ones that will be spewed out of His mouth. Maybe those are the ones who stand before the throne with palm branches, a number too large to be counted, who come out of the great tribulation, saved undoubtedly, at the cost of their lives, after much discomfort.

Maybe.

But it could be exceedingly worse! Perhaps those in the church—that He spews out of His mouth and those He commands to depart from Him—will suffer the fate of those who considered themselves believers, who called Him, Lord, whom He commanded, *depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

What a fearsome thought.

Surely we are to tremble at His Word, for the Lord spoke most plainly when He said, *if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My words has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.*¹⁷

What I call for today is for you, for us all, to understand that God is an Awesome God, greatly to be feared. His Word is to be trembled at, studied, obeyed and taught to others. It is not to be ignored or selected from capriciously as a matter of personal preference.

¹⁷ John 12:47-50.

We cannot abdicate our personal responsibility to any denomination, or church or man. We are accountable to God, individually. If the denomination is wrong, it must change! If it won't change, you'd better bundle your stuff and move somewhere else – because His Word will judge on that day. The Lord Jesus said so Himself. Amen and amen.”

With that he sat down; and for that, they kicked him out. But before they did, one surly question was thrown at him: ‘Since, according to you, there are no pure churches, why start another flawed work, soiled in your own image?’”

Mick responded, “The Word tells us to go and preach the Gospel, yet it commands us, first, to tarry... *until ye be endued with power from on high.*” We must go, but we are commanded to go *in* the power of the Lord. Both are vital. To omit either is wrong. The Scriptures are full of promise. Did not the Lord Himself say, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it?* He has given us His power to do His work. We are exhorted to tarry until we apprehend that power, and then to bear much fruit that we might bring glory to the Father, for Jesus said *if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

How dare we think we can go without His power; how dare we presume to have same without understanding that we must have and keep His commandments? We must repent and do things His way.

They said to him, “*Physician, heal thyself.*”

He said, “By the grace of God, I'll wait in obedience and faith, and believe He will empower us to serve the Master as He has commanded.”

The words of Mick were finished, and so we now conclude the story.]

Mick and Mercy joined the Lamemans in the field. It was invigorating, for there, as they taught the Gospel in love and obedience, with fasting and prayer, the power of God began to fall. The Lord healed the sick, delivered the oppressed and raised up a Biblical church in their midst. And He did it everywhere they went. It was glorious.

Less than two years into the new work, Mercy died. Her passing was the most severe trial of Mick's life. How he loved her, his sister and bride. He'd never met a more loving,

compassionate person. They'd shared life's exhilaration and pain for over 50 years. She understood, loved and accepted him. She knew everything he knew. She could finish his sentences, yet he remained as friend and hero in her eyes.

How he missed her. Mishpat always thought he'd go first. He was shocked that she preceded him into the royal chambers of heaven. He wept for joy at her promotion; and he wept in his loneliness. David and Faith helped him bear his sorrow until, as he ministered the Gospel, he recovered his zeal for life. He was a great preacher, loved by all until the Lord took him home some years later.

David and Faith began their life together in Israel. Faith became an expert farmer. She used advanced technology to achieve rapid growth and nutrition in vegetables and fish. Her dedication and brilliance won the hearts of the Israelis with whom she studied. She maintained a dialogue with them for many years. Some of her creative fieldwork pushed the state of the art. Her personal interest was in research. Her methodology was to teach the locals to farm; she left it to her husband to teach them to work together in community. She loved David and was his faithful wife over 30 years until he went to be with his Lord. She marveled as he kept his promise to seek to be more like Jesus. He loved her better and more completely in the end than the beginning.

David became an outstanding Bible teacher and leader. He not only taught the Word, but he also taught men how to study it for themselves. The Lord raised up elders through him. He and Faith taught them to be sufficient in the Lord, both spiritually and naturally, and to reach out and teach others. Once that platform was established in the local church, and elders appointed to oversee the work, David and his beloved move on. Until his death, Mick was with them, always taking great delight to revisit the churches they had previously planted.

Much of David's resources were spent establishing farming churches in remote parts of the world. He never lost his love of Bible study; and always thought of himself the most fortunate of all men to be allowed to serve Jesus. He marveled at such a darling wife, whom he loved with all his heart.

After his death, Faith returned to Israel and resumed her research. Recognized by the nations for her humanitarian contributions, she travels and encourages the young to follow her Lord Jesus. She lives comfortably on the provision of her husband and their God.

In her private moments she longs to finish the race that was set before her. With silent groaning, she hungers for her place in Jesus Christ, Beloved Son of God, First Born among many brethren; and to sing, once again, the glorious songs of Zion with Mishpat, Mercy and David.

Glossary of Characters

(In order of appearance)

1. Church member, **Layman “Limpy” Lameman**, aka “**David**.” CPA/Businessman; Long-term, self-taught Bible Scholar. True Christian believer and Bible Teacher. A man who genuinely loves God’s Word but who is concerned that the Church has departed from the best ways of the Bible.

2. Senior Pastor, **Nicholas “Niko” Laos**, Th.D., a strong proponent of one-man rule in the local church, he is of the seed of the Nicolaitans Jesus warned about in Revelation 2:6,17. The word, *Nicolaitans*, appears twice in the Scripture, both in *Revelation 2*. It derives from *nikao* (to conquer, vanquish, overcome) and *laos*, the people. This, too, is the etymology of Nicholas, a common first name. According to the Bible, Jesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. His type of leadership was described in 3 John 9, where John said, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.”

3. National Overseer, **Mishpat “Mick” Metano**, Th.D., who tells David, “My father knew the Prophets, and that God often told them what to name their children, and that those names foretold things God was going to do. My Papa named me, Mishpat, which is Hebrew for *judged* or *judgment*. He felt I would be a messenger for God, and that mine would be a heavy word. When you add our family name, Metano, the picture is even clearer. It was actually anglicized when my parents went through customs. The real name is Metanoeo, which means *repent* in Greek. Thus, my father believed my message was *repent* or *judgment*, and so he prayed for me until his death.”

4. Wife of National Overseer, **Mercy Metano**, Mick’s Loving wife of over fifty years. Mercy is a nurse by formal training. She faithfully loves, supports, and works beside her husband until she precedes him in death a few years before he dies.

5. Professor, **Didasko “Diko” Gramma**, Th.D., Greek Scholar. Diko is a long-term family friend of the Metanos. He is a Greek professor in the Bible college. Mick invites Diko to join him and David in their important discussion.

6. Secretary, for National Overseer, **Faith Elizabeth Pistis**. Faith is a graduate of the Bible College with a degree in music. She is a wonderful soloist and pianist, and her interest, in addition to teaching a Sunday School class for her beautiful five-year-olds, is to become an expert farmer. She uses advanced technology to achieve rapid growth and nutrition in vegetables and fish. Her dedication and brilliance wins the hearts of the Israelis with whom she studies.