

PASSING THE BATON NUMBER 13
Authority and Leadership in the 21st Century church
'A different way of living a different way of loving'

29th March 2008

Prayer:

Father, thank You. Thank you so much, for Who you are, for Jesus, for the Holy Spirit. We are so grateful Lord. So grateful. Father, we acknowledge that the Kingdom is about You. How you like to order things how You like to do things in the world of Your heart.

We are asking today Lord that you would renew our minds, touch our hearts, make us glad again in our salvation and all it means. Refresh us, renew us, touch us, teach us.

Thank you that permission is granted for us to live in your outrageous favour. We ask Father, as a company of people here today that we will know that favour in a tangible expression today, that chains will fall off, hearts will be restored, joy will rise, strength will rise, we will be a people who rise up into everything Jesus won for us on the cross and He so longs for us to inhabit and possess, we want Him to see the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

Father prepare our hearts for what You want to do in this next season. Show us the things we need to put down in order that you can give us something bigger. Help us to be willing Father, help us to will.

Father we want the privilege of being astonished and living a life amazed at Who you are. Teach us to learn to magnify you, teach us to marvel, teach us to be amazed every single day, to rise up and come before You to ask You for the things You so want to do.

Father, I don't understand, but I trust You; we want to live outrageously in your favour and grace, we want to see miracles, we want one of us to put a thousand to flight, we want to be convinced of your bigness, your majesty, your sovereignty, Your magnificence towards us, we want to dream big dreams and live out them while there is still time. We want to stand before you – confident. Those of us Father who aren't confident in You, do something today that will reverse all that. Line them up, place them squarely in your Presence. Let them experience You.

We want to know your heart, your mind, so come in your fullness and be and do just what You want with us today – we love You. We worship You. We bless You. We magnify You.

And Holy Spirit, how I love you, I am so in awe of You, but I love you. Please come and do what you do best, show us Jesus, show us what He has in mind, show us His heart for His people. Thank You, You never condemn, never accuse, You always lead us and guide us so gently, for our own good. Please come, in Jesus name. Amen.

Introduction:

God is shaking the church out of her paradigm. We are in a New Era. I make no apologies for repeating this over and over again. In her “Dust Bowl” prophecy at the end of October last year, Chris Larkin said -

“The structure the Lord is ordaining for the new time is built first on relationship, with function following. Just as God is relational first and out of relationship, life comes. Who we are together will determine what we will do. There is no lack of things to do but there is a famine of true fellowship. Fellowships of the heart will emerge from the dust storm. It will seem like all that is left from our old way of life is a heart to serve God with no form or structure to hide behind.”

The church does not exist for itself, but to reveal God’s glory.

When God does a new thing, it will not be to fulfil our expectation of how things should function, and to satisfy our personal preferences, but it will be to fulfil **His** eternal purposes. Therefore, we may find it uncomfortable, strange and even unpleasant at first because it will move us dramatically from one place to another.

Today I suspect I may, as Bob Mumford would say *“burn your biscuit!”*

I have permission to speak to you about the new order of things. Because that order is totally different from the old, and it may make us distinctly uncomfortable as I said – beloved, it is intended to. It is time for us to come out of our comfort zones, into the Power and Presence of God.

God is doing a new thing and we are required to heed what He says to us through His prophets.

We are only as good collectively as we are individually – coming together won’t bring power unless we each come with light. It is time for us to live a life of celebration and victory.

I began our meeting on the 1st December last year like this -

“In order for the body of Christ to prepare itself to be the Bride of Christ, as it one day must be, we need to have not another revival, not another great awakening but a complete reformation. A reformation in our approach to the scriptures, a reformation in our approach to each other, and a reformation especially in our approach to God and our love for God. When this takes place, and only then, can we truly obey the first and greatest commandment that we should love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all our mind and all of our strength. This is the essence and true meaning of our calling as Christians.

Beloved, there is a fresh wind blowing. Today is just the start of what God is seeking to do, and will do, in His church before Jesus comes. A complete reformation of the way we think, perceive, and live out our faith.

So may God bless you as you listen to this, may He awaken in you a desire to commit yourself

to Him afresh this day, forsaking all other, cleaving only to Him, it is only from putting this relationship first in our lives that we will enter the power and authority God wants to bestow upon His Church before Jesus comes. Beloved, we have choices to make."

I don't know about you, but for some time I have experienced what I can only describe as a Divine dissatisfaction with the way we 'do' church, and I have felt guilty about feeling this way.

Now prophets are speaking; the cloud is moving, people are leaving churches both institutional and charismatic; we know something is happening, but we aren't sure what it is, but we are still the body, the church, the bride, the army of God.

We are in transition between one move of God and another. At this time doing what we have always done the way we have always done it will result in us getting what we have always got. The same message will bring the same results and will kill what the Spirit is seeking to impart to us.

Jonathan Edwards said, *"The task of every generation is to discover which direction the Sovereign Redeemer is moving and move in that direction"*.

Bob Mumford says one of his parishioners said to him when he was a young pastor, *"Pastor, are you in the move of God?"* He said, *"I certainly am!"* and went home, fell flat on his face on the carpet and said to the Lord *"Lord, what is the move of God?"*

I would ask you the same thing today – are you in the move of God? And how would you know? If you aren't, do you want to be? And are you prepared to pay the cost to enter the Kingdom? I'm not talking about salvation; you can't lose that once you have it. I am talking Kingdom, the Kingdom of God in your life and mine, coming into everything Jesus won for us on the cross.

The task before us today is to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches and when we hear, to respond.

My dream:

Whilst in preparation for this day I had a dream. In this dream I was watching two people painting an old car, it was probably upwards of 50 years old, it was like a bull nosed Morris if any of you remember that. They had painted it white with black flames coming up from the bottom of the door and wheel arches. I could see ridges in the paint where they had applied it thickly and without expertise, I knew that they were preparing to sell the vehicle, as I was aware they had already sold another before, I could see it away in the distance. Another make-over.

As I meditated and prayed on the dream, I felt the Lord was saying, *"This is My church. Every time I do a new thing, they do a make-over of the old and market it as new."*

Just think about it.

Time and again we have bolted the new onto the old until the church is so cumbersome it cannot move.

This is specifically a characteristic of the charismatic movement.

Renaming things and calling cell groups house groups when there is no intrinsic - and by that I mean basic and essential – change, just isn't going to cut it any more.

That is like going into the supermarket and seeing 'new, improved' on everything and finding it is either just the same, or not so good!

We cannot market church like washing powder.

Beloved, we are *in* a New Era in God.

We are not just in a new season.

This is a new **Era**.

We have to look for the signs and follow Him.

Do not let us do a make-over on what we already have and try to market it as something new, let us hear what God is saying and asking of us and let us respond to Him, letting go of what we need to let go of in order to embrace the new. Whenever God does something new we have to let go of something – the old.

I have been challenged recently to let go of what I have been doing for the past 15 years or so, because God wants to bring me into something different.

Be alert today to what He may be asking *you* personally to let go of in order that He can give you something **BIGGER**.

We are in a time of Divine acceleration.

We are behind the times and we need to learn to run.

I have no doubt I will ask more questions than I answer today, I may even make you mad – it would be lovely if I made you glad - but that is not a bad thing if I make you mad if it causes you to question where you are, to seek God and move to align yourself with Him.

If we keep doing what we have always done, we'll keep getting what we have always had. Got to move on from same old same old...

A New Era – is the Kingdom coming?

We are in a new Era in God, and He is releasing eye salve to us, we are in a time of His unparalleled, unprecedented favour, it behoves us to hear and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches, in this most amazing of times in our history. Please don't let us bolt this on to what we already have. I pray God He will not let us do that again.

Graham Cooke says in a recent communication:

“Kingdom Life is far superior to church life. It has a broader reach into society and no religious overtones. We are not sanctuary driven; not limited by professional Christians; and not bound by the conventions of man. We are free to encounter God in all His grace, laughter, love and mercy. We revel in truth, bask in His favour, adore His Presence and commune with His Majesty in all circumstances.

This is the year of extraordinary happenings. Whatever we know about church or have experienced about church has not prepared us for what God is about to do. He is doing a new thing and we must renew our mind in order to grasp the enormity of what He has put in front of His people. The next part of the book of Acts is being written on our hearts. The roll call of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 is about to be added to in our day. It’s exciting! We are going to see the modern equivalent of David’s Mighty Men come forth from a nameless, faceless generation.”

What I will be talking about today is what Jesus talked about all the time – not church – but **Kingdom**. *There is a profound difference.*

As Graham said, Kingdom life is far superior to church life. Broader, wider and with no religious overtones.

We are unlimited in Kingdom life, we are free to encounter God personally in all His grace, love, laughter and mercy, He does not place restrictions on us, nor do we place restrictions on Him, we greet each day with expectancy looking forward to seeing what He will do. We bask in His favour and enjoy His Presence knowing that we are the beloved of God.

We are learning to sing to a different melody, to resonate with a different frequency, to live in the unforced rhythms of grace, to live a life less ordinary, to expect the miraculous in our everyday lives. If we aren’t there we soon will be if I have anything to do with it!

This is not finger pointing exercise about where we have been and how we have failed, this is a new Era, we haven’t walked this way before, so open your hearts wide to hear what He has to say about what we have up until now, understood about what it means to be church, weigh it, pray it, measure it, don’t just swallow it! I would be glad if you would come back to me with comments or questions when you have digested it. Feel free to bounce the content off your leaders. We are in a time of profound change – and change is here to stay. Our destiny hasn’t changed, but the way we might be getting there surely has.

Please hear me when I say I intend no judgement in what I am about to teach, preach or maybe even prophesy today. We could not see this before; this is fresh revelation. God is doing the revealing, it’s the way He is with us, He has consistently revealed Himself through the Bible and the Person of His Son from Genesis to Revelation. Today He is just being Himself. Utterly magnificent. He is striding forth to fulfil His eternal plan and we are sorely in need of catching up with Him. He is purposeful, and intentional.

Everything God has ever done has been for one end - to provide one eternal companion for His beloved Son.

Boiled down, that is what it is all about.

He is unwavering in this, and He is accelerating in His desire to see the match take place.

The wedding of the Universe is going to happen – we are the bride – and we *will* be ready.

The Holy Spirit is releasing to us the capacity to live as the Bride, let's take advantage of what He is holding out. Take advantage of His grace and goodness. Beloved it is time for us to stop being casual about the Kingdom and begin to understand His eternal purposes.

There are times when we have to 'constrain' Him in order that we may go with Him. Remember Jesus at least twice '*made as though He would go on*' and it wasn't until 'they constrained Him' that he 1) got into the boat and 2) went in to eat with them on the road to Emmaus. Let us constrain Him today by our desire to find out where He is going and go with Him. He is asking -

"What do you want Me to do for you?"

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

Review:

We have been building over the past two months on the role of women in the church, the home and society, where we learned that we were created equal male and female, different, but equal, then Biblical Submission, relating the latter to 'leaning on the Beloved', utter dependence on God.

It is very important that we have followed the Holy Spirit's direction, because the lessons we have learned and are learning about being submitted to the Father and leaning on the Beloved, will become effective now in our relationship with God and with one another as we examine the whole issue of church life and fellowship life. 'Love and marriage' the old song said, 'go together like a horse and carriage', but without the first, you can forget the second.

We are going to look at what submission looks like in the context of fellowship life, because the ***purposes of God*** are born out of fellowship - first with Him, and then with each other. His purposes are not born out of church attendance and religious activity, they are born out of relationship.

We are coming into a time when the ***Kingdom*** is taking precedence over everything we have hitherto experienced.

We have become focussed on 'church' and the Kingdom message has suffered as a consequence.

I imagine that this has had more of an impact on those of you who have attended 'charismatic' or 'Pentecostal' churches, than mainstream Methodist, Baptist, or Anglican churches. The

problems with dominating and controlling leadership seem to only appear within the former, where I have observed the greatest fall out and pain due to insecurity in the leadership. There are many people whose lives have been devastated by the split or break up of a church because their eyes were on the church and its leaders, not on King and the Kingdom.

Isaiah 6:1 AMP

'In the year that King Uzziah died, [in a vision] I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the skirts of His train filled the [most holy part of the] temple.'

Sometimes God has to remove our 'King Uzziah' in order for us to see Him.

He will not hesitate to remove anything or anyone who is in the way of your knowing Him intimately, He is a God whose name is Jealous.

Today my remit is to speak to you about four things-

- *koinonia*, the Greek word for fellowship,
- the difference between the church and the kingdom
- emerging leadership and authority in the church, and
- God's uncommon love which is the key to where we are going

We will be exploring what changes in our thinking would have to be made to transform the way we see ourselves, one another, the church, the Kingdom and our role in the earth.

God's original intention 'koinonia' – fellowship:

As I prayed and sought the Lord, I felt impressed to take the word '*koinonia*' first. This is a Greek word which is not easily translated into English. It is, as Peter Stott would say, '*Better felt than told!*' It is that sense of 'oneness' you experience when you meet another brother or sister in the Lord, and something leaps in your spirit.

Unity.

It cannot be man-made, it is unity in the Spirit.

Jesus gave us a model for what He intended whilst He was here on earth. He lived, ate, slept and communed with His disciples. For three and a half years they shared their lives, they were together night and day. They were *friends*, living in community, not I hasten to say, commune. There is a vast difference. What Jesus modelled for us was community, as they went, He taught them about Who He was and what He was going to do, and what He was leaving behind for them to continue, and by living with them, He gave the pattern of how they should continue.

The book of Acts describes it like this:

Acts 2: 42-47 AMP

“And they steadfastly persevered, devoting themselves constantly to the instruction and fellowship of the apostles, to the breaking of bread [including the Lord’s Supper] and prayers. And a sense of awe (reverential fear) came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were performed through the apostles (the special messengers). And all who believed (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ) were united and [together] they had everything in common; And they sold their possessions (both their landed property and their movable goods) and distributed the price among all, according as any had need. And day after day they regularly assembled in the temple with united purpose, and in their homes they broke bread [including the Lord’s Supper]. They partook of their food with gladness and simplicity and generous hearts, constantly praising God and being in favour and goodwill with all the people; and the Lord kept adding [to their number] daily those who were being saved [from spiritual death].”

Community or commune?

When it says in **Acts 2:43-46** that everyone ‘*had everything in common*’, it is not saying that they pooled all their resources and became a commune.

The Bible is very clear about ownership and stewardship and gives us the responsibility for these.

- In a **commune**, you **are** required to sell everything and give it to the co-operative. You then live in one of the communal houses. The co-operative owns the property, and it owns you. You have no rights of ownership to anything. Once you are in their house, everything you earn is put into the central pot and shared out evenly by the leadership, no one owns anything. You have no money of your own, the co-operative provides for your food, housing, clothing and everything else. That is the idea behind a commune. It’s a bit like joining the forces!
- In **community**, however, it is your responsibility to rent or buy your house and look after your own family. In community every person must be a steward of their property, but they must make sure that they give to God whatever He requires. So you would say ‘*everything I have is the Lord’s, if you have a need, and the Lord tells me, I will give you whatever it is you need.*’ In other words you are prepared to **share** what you have with others, *at the Lord’s direction, not under pressure from anyone.*
- In community it is also our responsibility to help the poor among us. This is not giving handouts to people who cannot manage their money. This is being pastorally aware of where there are genuine needs, and calling the fellowship to meet that need, whether by time, advice, guidance, practical assistance, or money.

God gave clear instructions to Israel in the Old Testament about the poor, whom Jesus said, you will always have with you.

Leviticus 25:35-40 AMP

'And if your [Israelite] brother has become poor and his hand wavers [from poverty, sickness, or age and he is unable to support himself], then you shall uphold (strengthen, relieve) him, [treating him with the courtesy and consideration that you would] a stranger or a temporary resident with you [without property], so that he may live [along] with you. [1 John 3:17.] Charge him no interest or [portion of] increase, but fear your God, so your brother may [continue to] live along with you. You shall not give him your money at interest nor lend him food at a profit. I am the Lord your God, Who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. And if your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a bondman (a slave not eligible for redemption), But as a hired servant and as a temporary resident he shall be with you; he shall serve you till the Year of Jubilee,'

1 John 3:17,18

"But if anyone has this world's goods (resources for sustaining life) and sees his brother and fellow believer in need, yet closes his heart of compassion against him, how can the love of God live and remain in him? Little children, let us not love [merely] in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth (in practice and in sincerity)."

The principle here, as we saw when we looked at tithing, is that God owns everything. Our hearts are being tested all the time as to how we deal with our time, our money, our resources. In other words, our talents, in relation to ourselves and others around us.

Everything we have is on loan to us from Him, nothing is ever ours at all. It really isn't *"I give You 10% Lord and the rest is mine."* Your time, your talents, they are all His, on loan to you as a steward.

So the church is intended to be a community, not a commune, not a lonely hearts club, but a thriving community of like-minded people who care deeply about one another. Our relationships are not meant to be superficial.

Two kinds of fellowship – vertical and horizontal:

1. Fellowship with God, consisting in the knowledge of his will **Job 22:21; John 17:3;**
2. agreement with his designs **Amos 3:3;**
3. mutual affection **Rom. 8:38, 39;**
4. enjoyment of his presence **Ps. 27:4;**
5. conformity to his image **1 John 2:6;**
6. participation in his happiness **John 17:13, 1 John 1:3, 4**

When Jesus spoke of church, He intended that we should have something called 'fellowship'.

The Greek word is *'koinonia'*. *Partake, partner, share, communicate, commune, contribute, distribute, fellowship.*

'*Koinonia*' was used of family relationships, that is why we can say we are the children of God, we *share* the Divine Nature because God has given us of His very self. We are *partakers* of the Divine Nature.

Koinonia births in God Himself because it is essentially a quality that loves and shares what it has with others in order that they may partake and share everything.

God so loved, He gave...*Koinonia* leads us into God's love – 'agape', because *koinonia* is agape.

A whole new way of living a whole new way of loving.

When we are born again, Father comes in and shares every part of our lives, our joys, sorrows, and everything else. He gives us His Holy Spirit as Jesus promised and He is interested in *every* detail of our lives because He lives in the revelation of *koinonia* – *participation, partnership - with Him* and it is His desire that we go on to live in this same intimate relationship with Him and with our brothers and sisters.

So, our fellowship is both vertical, with God and horizontal, with others.

Fellowship with God:

1 Corinthians 1:9 AMP

"God is faithful, (reliable, trustworthy, and therefore ever true to His promise, and He can be depended on); by Him you were called into companionship and participation with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

The definition of fellowship with God is that we have fellowship with the Godhead through the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

2 Corinthians 13:14 tells us that '*our fellowship is with the Holy Spirit*'. God doesn't only want *communication* with us, He wants *communion*, intimacy, fellowship.

He doesn't want to be just the source of everything we need where all we see are His hands in provision. He wants us close to His heart and seeing His face.

He accomplished this when He gave us the new birth in Christ which brought us into His heart, this is why we can say '*Abba, Father*'. It is said of Moses that he knew God's *ways* but the Israelites only knew His *works*. In other words, they knew provision, they never knew, nor did they seek to know, intimacy, they only wanted their needs met, and right now please.

Where the Divine Nature is, there is *koinonia*.

We have things in common with God because of our new birth. God gave us all a lump sum at the point of our new birth - all that He had and felt inside Him, He planted as a seed in us, new DNA.

He did this because He did not want a distant, formal acquaintance, He wanted true relationship. We have fellowship with the Godhead by the Holy Spirit who is in us. Vertical and horizontal.

1 John 3:7 AMP

“What we have seen and [ourselves] heard, we are also telling you, so that you too may realize and enjoy fellowship as partners and partakers with us. And [this] fellowship that we have [which is a distinguishing mark of Christians] is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (the Messiah).”

Fellowship of believers:

Bob Mumford describes *koinonia* between **believers** as *“break off a piece of yourself and give it to me”*.

Feed me with yourself.

Oswald Chambers says, *“we need to become broken bread and poured out wine for our fellows.”*

True fellowship is costly. Paul says of Timothy - whom he subsequently appoints as an elder - in -

Philippians 2:20-22: AMP

*“For I have no one like him [no one of so kindred a spirit] who will be so **genuinely interested in your welfare and devoted to your interests**. For the others all seek [to advance] their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ (the Messiah). But Timothy’s tested worth you know, how as a son with his father he has toiled with me zealously in [serving and helping to advance] the good news (the Gospel).”*

How many of you know it is possible to toil zealously with a hidden agenda? *“All others seek to advance their own interests...”*

- The definition of *‘koinonia’* amongst **believers** is: ‘having *everything* in common, sharing and community’. Here are a number of people and they have many things in common, not yet all, but they are prepared to work at it until they have ‘all things’ in common. So, it is the sharing of your very life and nature with everyone else around. Not just a little circle of those with whom you get on well, that’s a clique, but a sharing of your whole life, with others. Your joys, your pleasures, your pains, and your burdens. It was never used to describe a society or group of people who had just one or a few things in common. It describes a close, sincere, loving, relationship.
- *Koinonia* then, means sharing of your life and everything connected with it, just like Jesus did with the disciples when He walked the earth.

And the real thing is costly.

We being many are one body...

We are all a gift to each other in the body of Christ. All that we have in our salvation is what we have in common. No denominations, no labels, just one body. The Head has risen, and the body remains here until the rapture, the catching away of the Bride.

Fellowship (*Koinonia*) begins small and grows. It begins in the home with husband, wife, and children, it extends to small groups, and then encompasses church and other groups, eventually it should grow to reach the nation – or if not the nation, at least the neighbours!

Koinonia begins when God releases you to fellowship with others.

If we are truly functioning in this, all the gifts, ministries, and insights necessary to meet our needs will be found in the smallest gathering, because we are relaxed and able to be ourselves, God is in the midst of us. It is a safe place. We are in Father's house; masks can safely be dropped.

You can see by now, that *koinonia* is all about relationships. Firstly, with God Himself and then with others. Always the same, vertical before horizontal. If we go horizontal without going vertical, all we have *is* a social club with religious overtones and we will fall in and out with people because grace is not operating. I remember having a conversation with someone some years ago when I spoke of a third person "*Oh I've fallen out with them*" "*Then fall back in*" I said, much to their amusement. And they did. It is so important that our relationship with the Father is established first.

Fellowship is necessary for maturity. We can reach a certain degree of maturity with God without close contact with other believers, but we level off and stagnate if we are not in company with them. It is within these close relationships that growth takes place; I'm not talking about a handshake at the door on Sunday and nothing else. That won't grow anything.

Proverbs 27:17 -

"As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another".

You need to be in pretty close contact to rub against one another in this way. Fellowship, real fellowship, has a way of expanding and challenging us to face and change some of our attitudes, motives, and perceptions.

When we experience true fellowship there is a coming together of brothers and sisters black and white, rich, and poor, street people and institutional church, all sharing and fellowshiping with each other.

It stretches us to encompass different cultures and identifies our own weaknesses, limitations, prejudices, and mindsets.

God has this tendency to put us with who we **need** to be with, rather than who we would **want** to be with. His purpose? To knock off our rough edges, everything that doesn't resemble His Son.

Koinonia is reciprocal. It gives and it receives. It is something of Himself that God places in us so that we can love the unlovely and the unlikely. It involves sharing the good things God has given us, including our time, our talents and our treasure and our very selves.

It is costly.

The difference between church and Kingdom:

The church was designed to be a movement.

Jesus said, *"if you join My movement, this is what you can expect – movement"*.

When 'church' becomes a building, we become static if not stagnant.

We get an edifice complex, and the building dictates our priorities, our purpose and consistently aborts our God given mandate to move among the people and talk to them about the Kingdom of God.

What is more, it requires upkeep and places demands upon us, that we serve it. It changes its DNA. If you want to understand more about how church can become an entity on its own, I recommend that you read Bob Mumford's book "Dr Frankenstein and World Systems" published by Morning Star and available from Lifechangers . (www.lifechangers.org)

"Any church that cannot get by without buildings, finances and paid experts is not fully being church" that is a quote from a book by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch entitled "The shaping of things to come" written in 2003 and published by Hendrikson.

"Church buildings attest to five facts about the western church: its immobility, inflexibility, lack of fellowship, pride and class divisions" – that's not me, again it is a quote from someone else. Howard Snyder "The problem of wineskins" 1975. The gospel says 'Go' but our buildings say 'stay'. The gospel says 'seek the lost' but our building says 'let the lost seek us'.

On the other hand, there is the Kingdom.

"Kingdom Life is far superior to church life. It has a broader reach into society and no religious overtones. We are not sanctuary driven; not limited by professional Christians; and not bound by the conventions of man. We are free to encounter God in all His grace, laughter, love and mercy. We revel in truth, bask in His favour, adore His Presence and commune with His majesty in all circumstances."

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of His people. The next part of the book of Acts is being written on our hearts. The roll call of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 is about to be added to in our day. It's exciting! We are going to see the modern equivalent of David's Mighty Men come forth from a nameless, faceless generation." 1

I'm quoting Graham Cooke as I did at the beginning.

Like him, I am convinced that it is time for the back row to come forward – David's Mighty Men coming forth from a nameless and faceless generation. It is time for the body, the Bride, **you**, to rise to her place of distinction and glory before the coming of her Bridegroom King.

Someone has described church as *"sit, soak and sour"*- a spectator church.

It is no way to train believers to be priests.

We all have our part to play.

It's not about leadership's 'vision' and being pressed into following this anymore, but about equipping and releasing individuals into their God given destinies.

Please hear me, I am not criticising anyone, I am simply being a prophetic voice calling the Bride to her Bridegroom and into Bridal partnership with Him and if I have to shock you to do it, then I will do so.

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 16:18** that He is going to build something called His church and no matter how powerful the enemy is, or how cunning, or whatever tactics he uses, he will never be able to overcome what **Jesus** is establishing.

The church is described in glowing terms in **Ephesians 1:18, 19, 22 and 23**. And in **Ephesians 3:10** we see that the church is here, not to preach to the lower angels, but to preach to the higher-ranking angels.

Acts 2:42 is the New Testament matrix. The purposes of God for His church are born out of **Holy Spirit** led fellowship -

Acts 2: 42-47 AMP

*"And they steadfastly persevered, devoting themselves constantly to the instruction and fellowship of the apostles, to the breaking of bread [including the Lord's Supper] and prayers. And a sense of awe (reverential fear) came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were performed through the apostles (the special messengers). And all who believed (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ) were united and [together] they had everything in common; And they sold their possessions (both their landed property and their movable goods) and distributed the price among all, according as any had need. And day after day they regularly assembled in the temple with united purpose, and in their homes they broke bread [including the Lord's Supper]. They partook of their food with gladness and simplicity and generous hearts, constantly praising God and being in favor and goodwill with all the people; and the **Lord** kept adding [to their number] daily those who were being saved [from spiritual death]."*

Quite simply this was originally what church was meant to be.

Just like the Pharisees, we have added to the original.

The Israelites were given 10 commandments, by the time Jesus came there were something like 613! They added, and in so doing, subtracted from God's original intention, man's hands got on the work of God. The way we currently 'do' church is no different, our hands have got on the work of God and effectively stopped it.

As a people we have probably been going off since Paul wrote to the Philippians. Even then he was talking about people "*seeking their own and not the things of Christ*" He said that these Christians were seeking their own and were "*enemies of the cross of Christ*" **Philippians 3:18**. They wanted to walk their own way. "*Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, when you don't do the things I tell you?*"

It is encouraging that some of the problems in the church today are not unique; they have been around for 2,000 years. If we really want this badly enough, I believe God will give us a different kind of love to enable us to live a different kind of life. Life with the emphasis on the Kingdom.

Each of us has a part to play. We are like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, when we come together, we each bring our part and we should come *ready* to praise and worship, to contribute, to mutually edify one another. That is our responsibility. The level of faith you bring to the meeting can raise the level for the rest of us. The word you bring may liberate a number of people.

We don't come together to pew sit or be an audience we come to **participate** and bring our offering to the King and Kings and Lord of Lords. The days of church being a 'spectator sport' and an audience coming to church to be entertained are over.

This is the nature of the change that is coming beloved – everyone has something to contribute, no longer is it just up to the one or ones at the front. You have personal responsibility for the level of worship and of faith. You bring your own - rather like a packed lunch – but you have to be prepared to share it with everyone else!

Some of you will have prophetic words extant over your lives that you cannot see coming to pass either because of where you fellowship, or because you simply cannot see where you are right now. You may drop the ball, but God never does, believe me! This is all about coming into our inheritance, looking for revelatory truth, there is a call to dominion.

The church is battered and bruised, and the devil is smiling about our condition but we haven't come in to bat yet! We need to know where we stand.

So, the difference between Kingdom and church -

Matthew 13:44 – 46

“The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

We have settled for mediocrity.

‘Normal life’ is no substitute for spiritual life and spiritual reality, it is possible to sell everything and buy into religion. Buying into religion cannot help us. It is only the **Kingdom** – the reign and rule of Jesus Christ in **our** hearts and lives - that helps and changes us, church attendance, religion, doesn’t.

It is the **Kingdom**, not the church which comes demanding repentance: **Matthew 3:2** John the Baptizer comes saying, *“Repent (think differently; change your mind, regretting your sins and changing your conduct), for the **kingdom** of heaven (not the church) - is at hand.”*

It is the Kingdom, not the church, that is the believers’ proper priority -

Matthew 6:33 AMP

*“But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all **His kingdom** and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.”*

And in **John 3:6** Nicodemus comes to Jesus seeking the Kingdom.

*“Jesus answered him, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a person is born again (anew, from above), he cannot ever see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the **kingdom** of God.”*

It is the **Kingdom**, not the church, which Jesus explains to the bewildered apostles before Pentecost -

Acts 1:3 AMP

*“To them also He showed Himself alive after His passion (His suffering in the garden and on the cross) by [a series of] many convincing demonstrations [unquestionable evidences and infallible proofs], appearing to them during forty days and talking [to them] about the things of the **kingdom** of God.”*

It is the **Kingdom** not the church which is *“not in word, but in power”* -

1 Corinthians 4:20

“For the kingdom of God consists of and is based on not talk but power (moral power and excellence of soul).”

It is the **Kingdom**, not the church, which is delivered over to the Father -

1 Corinthians 15:28 AMP

“However, when everything is subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also subject Himself to [the Father] Who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all [be everything to everyone, supreme, the indwelling and controlling factor of life].”

It is the Kingdom, not the church, which is declared to be unshakeable -

Hebrews 12:28

“Let us therefore, receiving a kingdom that is firm and stable and cannot be shaken, offer to God pleasing service and acceptable worship, with modesty and pious care and godly fear and awe.”

The Kingdom of God then, is the sum of persons who at any given time are effectively **submitted** to the Lordship of Jesus Christ – you see why the teaching on submission has to come first, if you are not **submitted** to His Lordship, the Kingdom has limited application in you.

He is Saviour, but He isn't Lord.

The Church is the redeemed of all time, some in heaven, some not yet born, the church is the home for the family of God and the seat of the government of God on earth.

The church is different from the Kingdom.

We have never been told to preach church, but to preach Kingdom.

When the church proclaims itself, the world sees it as being self-serving.

What they hear is *“Would you like to come to my church?”* How many of us wince when you hear the words *“the end of your search for a child friendly church”*.

Who and what is being promoted?

Reading the gospels and the book of the Acts of the Apostles we are struck by the central and repetitive proclamation the *‘kingdom of God is at hand’*. Jesus only *once* said *‘I will build My church’*.

Neither Jesus nor any of the other Apostles preached *“Come to church”*.

So, what am I saying?

When we preach and proclaim His Kingdom rule, people repent and respond with the result that the *church is built*.

It is the Kingdom which is priority and out of that proclamation people are called out to embrace the Lordship of Christ.

The message is *“The Kingdom of God is here, Jesus rules, what are you going to do about it?”*

The Kingdom is at once both present and future – it is now, and not yet. It is received now and entered into hereafter. It is present within you and flows out from you to others: and it is to come in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes in His glory and all His saints with Him.

The kingdom is now, but not yet.

The Kingdom is at variance with the kingdom of man because the standards of behaviour are different.

The Kingdom expects the conduct and attitudes encompassed in the word of God to be embraced and enjoyed.

When we are born again we are under new management, under a new government, we have moved from the kingdom of this world into the Kingdom of His glorious light.

This new government is invading your life with the purpose of conforming you to His image.

Religion will never try to do that; religion is always satisfied with the status quo.

Only the Kingdom requires that you “walk the talk”.

As you speak, so you are.

A church without a Kingdom ethos and vision eventually becomes selfish and self-serving because the Kingdom is within you – the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within.

If this Kingdom is marginalised, and what the church promotes and pursues becomes paramount, the command to seek first the Kingdom in **Matthew 6:33** is nullified and what is sought is not the will of God, but the will and the kingdom of man.

Man’s hands on the work of God.

We must always hold both the Kingdom and the church in tension.

God has not finished with church.

What He has finished with is the way we have ‘done’ church for the last 2,000 years. Kingdom and Church, like love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage - without the first you can forget the second as I said before.

We are in a new Era.

Maybe the Era of the King Himself.

The Kingdom is a Person.

The King Himself.

We are seeking a Person, not an experience.

If we can discover Jesus, we become part of His purpose and His intention towards us. By doing this we will come into our inheritance.

1 Corinthians 4:20 AMP

“For the kingdom of God consists of and is based on not talk but power (moral power and excellence of soul).”

Corporately seeking His reign and rule in our hearts and lives, of one mind and purpose, we become the church He intends and His glorious Bride. The church is the visible expression of the kingdom on earth; it isn't the Kingdom; it is the visible expression of the Kingdom. Jesus came to put a face on God, we are here to put a face on Jesus.

When we see the **Kingdom** it stabilises us, it gives us an overview that surpasses the failures and faults of the local expressions of church. Many problems within the church context lose their strength when we perceive the **Kingdom** of God at work in our midst. The Kingdom, being different from the church, provides a base for unity without compromise. We can fellowship with all kinds of people simply on the basis of the transcendent nature of it.

If you believe in 7 raptures, bless you, I think you are wrong, but I no longer need to put you right. I know what I believe and it doesn't stop me fellowshiping with you. If you hear me, fine, if you don't fine. Love covers. How other people choose to run church becomes unimportant. We are released from criticism and trying to correct and change everyone and everything and have it our own way, because we recognise that the government is on **His** shoulders, not ours.

Isaiah 9:6,7 AMP

“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father [of Eternity], Prince of Peace. [Isa. 25:1; 40:9-11; Matt. 28:18; Luke 2:11.] Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end.”

This change comes about because we move from what is self-referential in us, what we want, what we like, what we are comfortable with, to what is self-giving, from Eros, to Agape.

Before we leave the issue of church and Kingdom, I want to draw your attention to something that Bob Mumford says. That is, the Kingdom can be given and taken. In other words, we can lose it. There is a salutary warning in a little booklet of his entitled 'The difference between the Kingdom and the Church'. He says that –

“...his observation is that church history could be more accurately described as Kingdom history. Because the Kingdom is ‘not in word, but in power’ and the Kingdom of God is ‘given and taken’ ‘I tell you, for this reason the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce the fruits of it.’ (Matthew 21:43) it affects the manner in which denominational history could be perceived.”

He talks of the Presbyterians, John Knox, 16th century Scotland, John Wesley 18th century, the Pentecostal movement 20th century, the Charismatic movement 20th century, and how they all were given the Kingdom, but as they ceased to bring forth fruit, it was given to someone else, in a different form. He goes on to say -

“Risking the anger and misunderstanding of the churchmen, I would observe that when a group or denomination fail or refuse to bring forth the ‘fruit of the Kingdom’ that power is taken and given to another. History of revivals can be seen in this light. The Kingdom is taken and given, taken and given. It is given to anyone producing fruit. God could give it to us – all we have to do is produce the fruit given in the 5 descriptions of priestly behaviour’.

When we look at what those five descriptions are, we will see why we have so dismally failed to continue to bear fruit and why God has taken away the Kingdom and given it to someone else and why it is so important that we do not try to do a paint and wallpaper job on something that is 50 years old in order to sell it to the public.

We will examine these descriptions when we look at the agape love of God.

Leadership and authority in the Church:

The Divine order of authority is –

- God,
- the scriptures,
- personal responsibility before God (a good conscience) no blame shifting!
- God’s delegated authority recognised through the local church leadership.

Question: By whom, to what, and where are you being led?

Leaders lead. Where are yours leading you?

A W Tozer says in his book ‘The Root of the Righteous’ that *“we are all too ready to follow the parade without knowing where it is headed.”* Do you know this day where you are headed under your current leadership? What are they leading you into? Are they leading you anywhere or are you all going round in circles? And are you confident that this is the way God is going?

We need to be moving in the same direction as He is or we just won’t reach our destination. If a boat is just a degree off course, it will not reach its desired haven. Where am I leading you today? Into the arms of your Bridegroom, or to me? If it is the latter, leave now, please, for both our sakes!

Because of the nature of the change, which is upon us, I do not want to spend too much time on this part of the teaching. The scriptures are clear about the qualities required for those who aspire to leadership and I have put the references on the sheet you have before you.

Emerging Leadership in the church:

When I prayed about this section I heard the Lord say it was to be headed up 'Emerging Leadership' since there is currently **emerging** in the church of Christ, a different kind of leader.

These men and women are totally in love with the Lord, totally focussed on Jesus and will build and encourage the flock, under His guidance.

They will be sacrificial towards both God and man and their goal will be to release people into their destinies.

Qualities of an under-shepherd:

As a sheep you should be looking for these qualities in your shepherd.

A good shepherd knows his sheep as individuals, not just as a flock.

A good shepherd will go out after the one, or ones, who are in danger of getting lost or who are losing their way.

A good shepherd is able to correct, without being perceived as rejecting, and it goes without saying that the flock need to have a teachable heart! This is somewhat reciprocal!

People need to be *loved by their leaders*, in such a way that they surrender to the love of God, which comes through leadership. Otherwise they will say *"If you try to make me I will fight you"* but, *"If you love me I will hear you: if you love me you can correct me"*.

Correction must *always* be with the best interests of the corrected at heart, not for the convenience of the leader or leaders.

Leaders must be aware that they are growing children from nepios a - child without speech, to huiois, fully mature sons. (We will look more that this concept when we look at spiritual warfare in May).

Leaders should demonstrate the **nature** of God. Though imperfect people ourselves, we are given the charge of developing other imperfect people, and are charged with loving them, whilst at the same time developing and growing ourselves.

It is an awesome task to be given care of the Good Shepherd's sheep.

We are directly responsible to Him for the way in which we treat them - that should put a healthy fear of God in us.

Good leaders grow.

They do not stagnate or go round in circles.

They are always pushing further into God in order to lead the flock on in Him.

When God is judging something He sends it in circles keep in mind; an example of this is the children of Israel in the wilderness, round and round they went.

Good leaders should be transparent, open, and honest, able to receive criticism without defending themselves, or retaliating. Their primary task is to teach people how to hear God for themselves, and to grow up in God. The goal is maturity, maturity, maturity.

Leaders are trainers, equippers, and releasers. Their prime task and responsibility is to equip **every** believer for works of service and to be a model of Christ-like behaviour. Not an easy mandate.

There are no super stars and no ministry elite in the body of Christ. Leaders are servants. Paul said this of apostles in:

1 Corinthians 4:9,10

“For it seems to me that God has made an exhibit of us apostles, exposing us to view last [of all, like men in a triumphal procession who are] sentenced to death [and displayed at the end of the line]. For we have become a spectacle to the world [a show in the world’s amphitheater] with both men and angels [as spectators]. We are [looked upon as] fools on account of Christ and for His sake, but you are [supposedly] so amazingly wise and prudent in Christ! We are weak, but you are [so very] strong! You are highly esteemed, but we are in disrepute and contempt!”

Leaders *lead* you into the Presence and purposes of God.

Leaders are meant to be so in love with God and to display such humility and servanthood, that by their fathering spirit and example they provide a model in **self-government**.

They teach people about maturity and self-control – a fruit of the Spirit – and how to live before the Lord in Spirit and in truth, with a clear conscience and short accounts.

True leaders will **always** teach people how to live in and before God.

This is what I term ‘personal responsibility’.

I will not be responsible for your life when I stand before the Bema seat of Christ to get my rewards on that day.

I am only responsible for doing what the Father tells me to do and it should be the same for you.

When personal responsibility is high on the agenda, blame shifting ceases, because we just **have** to take responsibility for our own reactions and responses – we cannot point at the

other fellow - whom incidentally, God has probably put there as your grace grower to show you what area He wants to kiss next in your life!

Paul spoke a lot about personal responsibility and keeping his conscience clear before God and man -

Acts 24:16 AMP

*“Therefore I always exercise and discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects] to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God **and toward men.**”*

2 Corinthians 4:2

“We have renounced disgraceful ways (secret thoughts, feelings, desires and underhandedness, the methods and arts that men hide through shame); we refuse to deal craftily (to practice trickery and cunning) or to adulterate or handle dishonestly the Word of God, but we state the truth openly (clearly and candidly). And so we commend ourselves in the sight and presence of God to every man’s conscience.”

References to the word ‘conscience’ are on your sheet for you to look up at your leisure. (Homework!)

We have a lot to learn about the ways of God with us; I don’t think they are as we think sometimes.

Everything He does is to accomplish one thing – to conform us to the image of His Son and to prepare the Bride.

If you look at the circumstances in your life right now through those lenses, things may become a little clearer. You are being transformed into His likeness -

Romans 8:29

“For those whom He foreknew (of whom He was aware and loved beforehand). He also destined from the beginning (foreordaining them) to be moulded into the image of His Son (and share inwardly His likeness), that He might become the firstborn among many brethren.”

Beloved it is your destiny to be like Him in your inward parts, in your very nature.

Every believer should know who Jesus is for them personally and be able to teach new converts the basic doctrines. **Each believer should be taught to discover and depend on God, not on the leadership.**

This is the task of true leadership, to develop people to their utmost potential in God.

I have heard it said that you should never place yourself under the authority of someone who doesn't have a greater vision for your life than you have yourself. In other words, they want to see you excel and reach your full potential in God.

Leaders are developers and enablers.

Good leaders learn to deal with failures and turn them in to positive learning experiences for people.

They should be kind, humble and full of mercy – yet firm, caring, and well-disciplined.

The leader's role is to balance care for the individual with protection for the flock.

We are not employers; we do not hire and fire people.

People are worth fighting for, and therefore our heart is always to win people.

It is my goal to see people surpass me in ministry, though I would be upset if I felt they surpassed me in character. Character is always more important than gifting, fruit, and baubles; much like a Christmas tree - one is decorative, the other comes from the root.

Good leadership increases everyone's capacity for reaching fullness in Christ.

Maturity is the goal of every person.

There is no place for immaturity – people should be **trained** to live a life led by the Holy Spirit where they are not subject to circumstances, not easily deceived and are not taken in by every wind of doctrine. And there's a lot of those about right now!

We should be able to smell false doctrine at ten paces and train our people to be able to smell it too. This does not mean that we do not associate with those who see things differently than we do. Quite the reverse. When we are Kingdom people, differences disappear – my salvation and walk is not threatened by the fact that you may believe in 7 raptures, or that you think we are going through the tribulation. I respect your right to be wrong as my pastor used to say. The point I am making here is that we should know what we know, believe what we believe and live in the good of it. Roger Price has a set of tapes on this. We must have our foundations in properly because it is on those that we build.

There are two things we absolutely need as Christians.

A sound theology – by that I mean knowledge of the scriptures - and an understanding of Gods ways with us. The Spirit and the Word coming together. We are the beloved of God. He absolutely adores us.

Love is the key to leadership and authority; this is why we need to change both our lifestyle and our love style.

To be remembered by both leaders and flock - Leaders are sheep too.

Qualities of Leaders and Elders:

Leaders, Elders and Deacons – are **servants**, the word ministry is the word service. My service to you this day is to bring this word of encouragement and comfort to you. I am a gift to you, you are a gift to me. Enjoy!

Definition of a Bishop: episkopos = overseer, Presbuteros, ‘an elder’ is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. The term ‘elder’ indicates the mature spiritual experience and understanding of those described in **Acts 20: 28**. *“Take care and be on guard for yourselves and the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you bishops and guardians, to shepherd (tend and feed and guide) the church of the Lord, which He obtained for Himself (buying it and saving it for Himself) with His own blood”.*

They oversee the work of God, under God Himself and are directly responsible to Him for the care of the sheep.

Definition of a deacon: Diakonos (Greek) primarily denotes a servant, whether as doing servile work or as an attendant rendering service. Ordained by the apostles, **Acts 6:1–6**. Qualifications of shown in **1 Tim. 3:8–13**. The Greek word translated deacon signifies **servant**, and is so translated in **Matthew 23:11; John 12:2**. Also translated minister, **Mark 10:43; 1 Cor. 3:5; 1 Thess. 3:2**.

Apostolic authority:

Matthew 16:19 AMP Jesus says -

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (declare lawful) on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven.”

People have mistakenly used this as a binding and loosing of the demonic, but it is not. Clearly it is in the context of **forgiveness** that He is speaking; He was handing Peter **apostolic authority** to rule and make decisions **in the church**, when He, Jesus, had gone back to the Father.

With this action He was equipping Peter, handing him the authority, to make decisions in everyday living about things pertaining to those who would become believers, those who would make up His ‘church’.

Jesus was giving him keys to leadership. He was saying there are going to be situations where you will need divine wisdom know therefore, that whatever *you* decide, it is decided thus in heaven.

He was giving Peter **governing authority**.

Part of apostolic oversight is the power of government.

It is useful to remember that the disciples had never heard of this thing called 'church' before, it had been a 'mystery' – which is something hidden – in the Old Testament, never mentioned, so they had no idea what it would entail, but Jesus equips them and gives them governmental authority.

He knew that by the time Peter was going to need to do this, he would have denied his Lord, and been reinstated, filled with the Spirit and bold in his speech and witness. At this point though, it was probably all 'Greek' to Peter, pardon the pun.

We see in the Acts of the Apostles how this worked out. Again, **Acts 2:42** "*The word of God, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.*" One and four go together – the word and prayer, that is the spiritual side. And two and three, fellowship and eating together, sharing your life.

Comes the time though, when they have a problem and the apostles (who must have been doing the waiting at tables) decide that their priorities must be the word and prayer, and so they select someone, just about fit to wait tables "full of the Holy Spirit" to do just that. Stephen. So, when you are full of the Holy Spirit, you are just about ready to wait tables!!

The way up with God, is down!

So exactly what are the qualities required to qualify to be elders, leaders, and deacons? To be full of the Holy Spirit and ready to wait on tables. These are *servant* ministries.

A different way of living, a different way of loving:

Introduction:

Agape - Vine's expository dictionary of New Testament words:

'Agape is defined as 'God's love towards us expressing the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver.'

'The Spirit of revelation has used it to express ideas previously unknown. Enquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint - the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible - throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the New Testament. From the Old Testament where it was man sacrificing to God to get back into fellowship, now God was sacrificing Himself for man, to bring man into endless fellowship with Himself, so the word agape was born.'

God wants us 24/7, I have heard someone say recently God said to him, *'I don't like timeshare, weekends with me and the rest of the week with the world.'* We laugh, but it is so true. How many of us go to church on Sunday, high day of the week and by Monday morning it is

business as usual. Bob Mumford calls it 'dirty six' go to church on Sunday and live as you like for the rest of the other six days.

God wants full custody of us and that is not unreasonable of Him, we are bought at a price, we belong to Him, He purchased us by His blood out of the kingdom of darkness into His glorious light.

As we saw last time, a radical change actually took place the moment we believed on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who has seen the Chronicles of Narnia knows what happens when Aslan breathes on them!

L.I.F.E.

The major change was that we changed *kingdoms*. From the kingdom of darkness, into the Kingdom of light. A transfer took place. Ownership changed too, from belonging to Satan, we are now the purchased possession of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

We were purchased by His blood and are partakers of the New Covenant, we belong to Him, we do not belong to ourselves. This world is no longer our home. That makes us strangers and aliens as Peter says, caught up in a global conflict between God on the one hand and Satan on the other.

Assume the position.

You are in My Son, live like it.

You have the inheritance of the first born; you are in My unprecedented favour.

The firstborn inheritance gives you ruler ship, a priestly function and a double portion.

There is a different way to live, a different way to love and God is going to teach us in this hour how to do both, but the choice is ours.

We are beginning to learn about the difference between the 'loves'. There are actually four types of love, these are all Greek words -

- *storge*, basic nurture, mother love, babe mum/dad bonding
- *phileo*, friendship/husband/wife/brother/sister/loyalty
- *eros*, sexual love
- *agape*, God's love.

For simplicity's sake, I will narrow it down to two. Eros, which is our 'common' love, the one we grew up with, the one we understand as love, the one the world understands as love. And agape, which is uncommon love, God's love.

Only agape love, freed of self-serving, will enable us to become what Jesus talked about and intends us to be before He comes again.

In order to understand the shift we need to make from our own common, fallen love, to the agape love of God, we need to contrast the two, and then make some choices about where we are going to live.

Common love: Eros

We are born with the distortion of the fall. We are intrinsically, and internally, twisted, and our love is intrinsically and internally twisted - bent towards ourselves.

We are unable to love God with all our heart, soul mind and strength because it takes God to love God.

We cannot do it in our own fallen nature and our fallen love is unacceptable to him because it always puts us first, comes from our soul and derives from our fallen nature, not the divine seed which He has placed within us.

It is essential that we begin to live from our spirit man, not our soul – from the inside to the outside.

Our ability to love and be loved, then, is shot through with the fall, even when we are born again.

‘Common’ love is **self**-centred love. It always seeks what is best for itself - what about me - and seeks to satisfy itself always, not others, not even our nearest and dearest. *“It would break my heart if you left me”*.

Love centering on how it will affect **me**.

It seeks to acquire then possess and finally control, the object of its ‘love’, without which it cannot survive.

So ingrained is this pattern within us, that even though a Divine seed is placed in us at the point of conversion, in many of our lives this seed does not ever sprout and grow. It is never vivified. It brings forth little fruit - the character of Jesus - instead it lies dormant, with common or Eros love on the throne of our lives.

We are at the centre, never having relinquished control to the Holy Spirit.

This is not a condemnation beloved; this is a diagnosis of a spiritual disease which is killing us.

It is invisible.

It is like a virus that is resistant to all antibiotics.

Unless we have a correct diagnosis, we are incapable of understanding what we need to do to get well.

Unless we face the hard facts, like an alcoholic, if we deny we drink we will never seek help to get free of the addiction. Self-centeredness, common love, is just as potent and damaging.

It is silently killing us and those around us by its demands.

Think about your relationships with your nearest and dearest – what causes most upset? Face it, it is when you want what you want, and the other person has other ideas – yes? It's called the sinful nature.

Paul's whole thrust in the New Testament about **putting off** the old nature and putting on the new in Christ, is about the shift from eros to agape. From the love which seeks the best for itself, to the love which seeks the best for others.

So we call it a multitude of things, the flesh, the carnal nature, the old Adam, the Adamic nature, the fallen nature, but essentially it is our self-centredness which results from the fall.

Boiled down, that is what it is.

And it is at **war** with God.

Paul says, in

Romans 8:7 AMP

*"[That is] because the mind of the flesh [with its carnal thoughts and purposes] is hostile to God, for it does not **submit** itself to God's Law; indeed it cannot."*

Notice the word 'submit'. The carnal mind, the unrenewed mind, the fleshly mind and nature, will not bow the knee to God's reign and rule; Lordship is the issue here.

All got it. We get to choose where we live. This isn't a salvation issue, this is a continuers issue.

Jesus said *"These are they who have continued with Me through My trials, and I bestow upon you a Kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one on Me..."* **Luke 22:28, 29.**

From this we see Kingdom beginning to emerge.

Continuers are living *Kingdom* lives.

By the decisions we make we govern whether we will be foot soldiers in the battle to come or warriors.

If Jesus isn't Lord, then you will not make it to warrior status.

Anyone who is a warrior has decided long ago that Jesus is Lord, therefore their complete confidence is in Him in any situation.

They have a Kingdom focus and a life less ordinary is theirs.

When we are born again and begin to attend a church, instead of finding another kind of love there we find a refined form of 'common' love, which is even powerful than that which we find in the world.

Paul put it this way *"For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus"*. We begin to imbibe a toxic love.

We are conformed to the image of the church, which itself is moving in eros love, not agape love.

This is not a condemnation, it is a diagnosis, bear with me.

We **need** an *agape conversion experience*, but first we will need to make Jesus Lord of our lives as well as Saviour.

So, are we ready to make Jesus Lord? If we are, here is a prayer:

Lord Jesus,

I acknowledge my need of you and accept you as my Saviour, my deliverer and my Lord. I invite you now to be the Lord (the authority and to be in control of, and be the final decision maker) in the whole of my life.

Lord of my human spirit and all my spiritual awareness and worship.

Lord of my mind, my attitudes, my thinking, my beliefs and my imagination.

Lord of my emotions and my expression of my feelings – anger, grief, joy etc.

Lord of my will and all my decisions.

Lord of my body, my physical health, my exercise, my diet, my rest and my appearance.

Lord of my sexuality and its expression.

Lord of my family and all my relationships.

Lord of my secular work and my Christian service.

Lord of my material goods and my perceived needs.

Lord of my finances.

Lord of my plans, my ambitions and my future

Lord of the manner and timing of my death.

Thank you that Your blood was shed that I might be free from the consequences of sin and that my name is written in the book of life.

Amen.

Uncommon, self-giving love: Agape

We live in a world dominated by common love, but there is something else on offer. The agape conversion. If you go for this today you will discover -

- That God's love will totally transform who you are.
- That you are embarked on a process, a series of steps, which will take you from where you are now to where the Lord wants you to be.

- That He *likes* you as you are, but He has designs on you.
- This process will take you from your past to your future.
- From sinfulness to righteousness
- From not knowing Who God is, to being intimately related to Him
- From unbelief to full trust in Who He is and what He says

Before we finish –

The Five descriptions of priestly behaviour:

I promised we would look at these when we came to look at the agape love of God.

The scriptures tell us that we are a Kingdom and priests **1 Peter 2:9**. *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, [God’s] own purchased, special people, that you may set forth the wonderful deeds and display the virtues and perfections of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*

As priests we are commissioned to do the following five things:

1. Absorb human failure
2. Love others without reward
3. Suffer vocationally – for the love of God constrains us
4. Intercede on behalf of others
5. Extend mercy

Beloved we will **never** be able to do this unless we have a change in our way of loving.

A shift from eros to agape, from common love to uncommon love.

To love as we receive love from the Father, children of the Kingdom - where Love is the key.

God is serious about what He is doing. He needs a supernatural community to be raised up who have the ability to communicate God’s love.

A different way of living, a different way of loving.

Up for it? Then here’s a prayer -

Prayer ‘Lord, change my love...’

Father, I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ your Son, recognizing that in me dwells no good thing. You have just shown me that even my love for my nearest – my husband/wife/children/friends/parents is shot through with sin.

You built me to need love and grow mature within the love of families and relationships, but I see Lord that the love I grew up with was faulty, I see that the pictures and ideas and concepts

and images of the way I grew to understand love are shot through with use, and manipulation, exploitation, possession, control, demand, criticism and judgment.

Lord, I don't want that anymore, I want your way of loving and so I say:

Thank you for love, but my love is filled with sin. I use and manipulate, possess and control, condemn and measure and use and judge. Lord, bring my love to death on the cross and raise up in me Your way of loving.

Thank you, Jesus, set my loved ones free from me so they are free to be to be to me all that you intend them to be. AMEN.

You may want to go one step further and ask the Lord to align you with His purposes for your life, if so, here is another prayer:

Prayer for alignment:

Father, I pray that I would become a person aligned with You, spirit soul and body, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually aligned with you and your purposes.

That you will train me in righteousness. You will train me to be joyful and peaceful and loving and kind and merciful and full of self-control. That the fruit of the Spirit is the choice way that I become aligned with You and I pray that that alignment will occur in my heart because that alignment Lord, will push me into a whole dimension of the Spirit in which I can be successful in areas of warfare. Without it Lord, I may be a liability in the day of trouble.

Would you raise up warriors, people who want to live aligned with You because they are fascinated by You. When we are fascinated by You, we are not intimidated by the enemy, no weapon fashioned against us will prosper because in our alignment we're steadfast, we're fixed, our heart is fixed O God, our heart is fixed and we're focussed on You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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