

THE SINS OF THE AMERICAN CHURCH
What Everyone Should Know

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INTRODUCTION

PLEASE READ FIRST!!!

I always think letting people know why you are writing on a particular topic is very important. In this way they'll know where you're coming from and why you are writing from the perspective you have. This helps to keep people from misjudging your intentions.

I've learned from experience that people have a tendency to misread your writings and see what shouldn't be there. I believe that explaining your intentions at the very beginning of any work that is religious in nature will help prevent people from taking your words and thoughts out of context.

This is simply because a person's religion is a very contentious subject.

This book is my viewpoint of the Sins of the American Church. It is a view from the top looking down (from a leadership perspective), and from the bottom looking up (from a new convert perspective).

My hope is this little introduction will guide you in understanding why I believe the American Church is sinning and needs to repent.

I want to start by saying I didn't grow up in the church. The first time I ever heard of Christ was at the age of ten. My grandfather, who was estranged from our family, left a children's bible on our porch for Christmas. It was the first time I'd heard of God or Jesus.

After reading the entire Children's Bible, and arriving at the conclusion that it was not a fairy tale, or fun story like those I read in other books, I asked my mother to find a church to come and pick me up on Sunday morning.

This first church experience would influence the way I thought of church for a long time.

Instead of meeting people like Jesus, which is what I hoped to find, I met people who were cold and rule oriented.

I was hurtfully judged by my poor appearance, excluded from worship and any youth activities, and made to feel unwelcome in the place I had hoped to find acceptance.

It wasn't until later in life that I came to fully understand what the Bible was really teaching and how far this particular church had strayed.

This new understanding changed the direction of my life. I came to believe that God was calling me to teach others about the life of love we were meant to live in the Christian Scriptures.

To enter God's kingdom is through love for God and people. We know these as the Two Great Commandments. The entire Bible is built upon these two foundational laws of love (Matthew 22:40).

This is really what I was looking to find when I first tried to attend church, but this is what I didn't find. I expected to find people like Jesus, but instead found people like everyone else I had met in my short ten years of life.

Jesus was loving, compassionate, accepting, a champion for the poor and rejected, forgiving, patient, just, and kind. I had never read about anyone like Him and I wanted Him above all things, even at the age of ten.

From reading the Bible at this early age I came to believe that the church should be like Jesus. In fact this is exactly what the Scriptures teach.

We are to have the mind of Christ, to follow Him in loving obedience, to be His body in the world, and numerous Churches in the United States have persisted in sin by rejecting

this truth as the standard outline for their community life.

I begin with this information so that you will understand that my ideals of the church were not shaped by the church, or people.

They were in every way shaped by Scripture.

As I continued to learn about the scriptures in College and Seminary I became further convinced I needed to share what I knew, but I found myself ignored and rejected by many people who called themselves Christians.

The churches I have served in as pastor were in no way attempting to follow their Lord. They were not obeying His commands.

Many churches in the United States fail in the same way to be the body of Christ in the world and they aren't even aware of this harsh reality.

They are calling Him, "Lord, Lord," but not doing what He asks of them (Luke 6:46).

They are wholeheartedly accepting Him as their savior, but not their Lord.

The same was not only true of the churches I served, but the leadership of those church institutions. There was a deep and engrained indifference and ignorance

concerning what the Bible really taught concerning the Christian Way.

For example; I attended one Seminary that taught Christian leadership, but never used Christ's teachings as the rule for what leadership was supposed to look like in the church.

Who would better know what leadership should look like in the church other than Jesus? How can we simply cast aside His principles and purposes?

Jesus had a lot to say about leadership. Many churches all over the world have denied His principles and commands for leaders.

In the United States most of the Christian leadership models resemble the role of the leader from a business perspective.

In America it seems Churches have traded their shepherds away for businessmen and women who use financial and consumer principles to govern the church they serve. They are truly friends of the world in this way (James 4:4).

Many churches in the United States have traded away the intended design of the community of God's people in scripture for a community that resembles social institutions and twelve step programs.

They are institutions and programs that are more likely to teach you how to succeed in life following the American Dream, than the Way of Christ.

They have polluted the Way of Christ by viewing it through the perception and desire to fulfill the American Dream

They call it progress and order, but I call it *sin*. They follow Christ in ways that enable them to still fulfill their own fleshly and earthly desires.

These desires, in part, have been placed, or nurtured in them by the ungodly culture of the United States. A culture that began to pull away from Godly values and pursuits after the Second World War and has steamed ahead to what it has become today.

This is the yeast that has infested the whole and has caused numerous sinful situations to be blatantly accepted by many American churches as the only way of being the church and being Christian.

It is a culture that has greatly moved away from Biblical designs for the community of the Followers of the Way (Acts 22:14).

We see this happening throughout Israel's history over and over. A generation would rise up that didn't know God, they would do what

was right in their own eyes, and God would correct them first through a prophet and then through calamity and destruction (Judges 2:10-15, Isaiah1: 1-4).

There was a natural inclination in the people of Israel to move away from God. This sinful nature still exists in the individual Christian.

Paul calls it the flesh. He describes a choice that we as Christians, even though we are released from the Law and it's penalty of sin and death, must continually make to follow the law of Love, or the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:16-26).

If we as Christians do run the race, or fight the good fight, or work out our salvation in fear and trembling, then we will naturally be inclined to go back to ways that lead us out of God's kingdom design for our life.

With all that I am about to lay forth in this book I don't want you to think that I hate the United States, despise it's freedoms, or reject the concept of the Church.

It is because I love Christ that I love this nation. It is because I love Christ that I serve the church. It is because I love Christ that I even care about the church. It is because I love Christ that my heart breaks when I see the body of

Christ far away from its perfect lover and His loving Way.

Because I was not shaped, or formed by the church's own ideals of itself, but by scripture, I have a different perspective. It is one that wasn't bred in me, nor indoctrinated in me.

My early encounter with the Bible and my love for its teachings stood as a barrier against the ungodly culture of the United States.

For these reasons I believe I've been able to uniquely see the church from the bottom as a new convert looking up and I've seen the church from the top as a Christian leader looking down.

I come to one conclusion. The church in the United States of America is a church enveloped in sin.

CHAPTER 1

Knowing Your Own Perspective

I feel that I need to define a few terms for those of you who understand the words “church” and “sin” differently than I do.

By understanding what I mean when I say church and sin you will know what it means in the scriptures, and what I mean when I use these terms in this book.

Many people believe the church is the building where the people meet, but this isn't what the word church means.

The word for church that the bible uses in the Greek is Ecclesia. It means the assembly, or gathering. It is referring to the people.

The building where the church meets is just a building. It is the place where the people meet together for worship and use as a base for learning and missions to the local community and world.

The early church met in people's houses and other locations such as Jewish Chapels and even on hill sides.

The next word I want to define for you is sin. The word the bible uses in its original language is the word “harmartia”.

This word is an archery term. It refers to an archer aiming an arrow and firing and missing the bull's eye at the center. It literally means "missing the mark."

This helps define the aim of this book. I intend to show how the people of God in the United States have missed the mark, or missed the very purpose of being the body of Christ in the world.

I intend to show how they have been conformed to the world instead of being transformed by Christ.

I intend to show how they have missed the mark and have failed at being the true salt and light of the world.

Please understand I'm not talking about all churches in the United States, but a majority will fall under this umbrella.

I want to make it clear that I can only speak for the United States. If you are from a different nation, then you will have to determine the possible sins present within the church you attend, through the *untainted* light of the scripture.

To see the *untainted* light of the scripture you will have to step out of yourself. You will have to look up and look down, and inside and

out from God's perspective instead of the one you've been taught, or know.

This means you will have to search for the truth and not blindly accept what you may know or believe as the Way, the Truth and the Life already.

This may also mean that once you see properly through the untainted light of the scripture that you will have an obligation to Christ.

If you love Him you will have to claim His ways, His truth, and His life in any sinful situation you encounter.

Let me first help you to understand what I mean when I say step out of yourself, because many of you are probably asking how this can be done.

First we need God's help. Jesus teaches us that the Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 14:26). We must ask and trust that the Spirit, who is the Lord (2 Cor. 3:17), will guide us into all truth.

Secondly we need to look at ourselves and recognize our own perspectives on the subjects being talked about.

We all have different perspectives. When we read the bible those perspectives influence how we understand what we read. Many times

our experiences or even our current life situation may influence how we read and understand the Bible, or approach God.

For example David in Psalm 8 looks up at the sky and is in amazement at the God of the Universe.

He says, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him” (NIV)?”

Many believe that David is writing this as a young man. This is because the Hebrew word we translate as avenger is also used when describing Goliath.

David may very well be in awe of how God used him as a little boy that praised Him and had faith in Him to conquer a great foe.

He is in awe of God’s vastness and man’s smallness and is wondering how God can care about man at all.

God is so far above us and so unlike us. God is all powerful and we are weak. God is all knowing and we lack understanding. God is present everywhere and we exist like a speck in the universe and yet God cares about man.

Job has a different perspective on the subject. He says something similar to what David says, but approaches God's vastness from a different angle.

Remember Job has lost everything. He has lost his family, possessions, and has become sick.

Job 7: 17- 21 says, "What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and test him every moment?"

Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men?

Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins?

For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more" (NIV).

Job, like David, looks upon the vastness of God and the smallness of man and through the perspective of his suffering asks God why.

I believe he wants to know, “What are humans to you God? Why should You even care about man who returns to the dust from whence he came?”

Why do You care so much about my life that You punish me and cause me to suffer? Why don't You leave me alone and stop bullying me, because I am only a man!”

Do you see how Jobs struggles lead him to view God's vastness and power differently? Our own life experiences, our early church learning, and yes, even our culture can influence how we read the scriptures.

Poverty and wealth can shape the way we understand scripture. Christ deals with both of these issues extensively in His teachings to correct our misled human perceptions.

Christ and His followers taught a great deal about status, about who our neighbor is, about how we should look upon people, ourselves, and our possessions.

They taught about how we should live in such a way that honors God and not the ways of the world.

It is the Way of Christ that calls us to love God more than the world and even our families. It is the Way that calls us to love people more than status, wealth, or earthly gain.

It is the Way of Christ that many Americans who have read their Bibles have never seen, or really understood.

Paul carries forth this concept in Colossians 2:8, 2:20, Galatians 6:14, and Romans 12:2. (Don't read one step further until you have read these verses and meditated upon them.)

It's time for the American Church to open its eyes. The days of slumber are over, and the time to awake is now.

Chapter 2

The Sins of the Leadership

Educational Sins

I think it's appropriate to start with the sins of the leadership.

In many ways you could say the problems that exist in the church have been the result of bad leadership. It is leadership that has gone astray from the true Biblical understanding.

Then again, those who instruct the leadership of the church, a church's educational institutions, can equally be blamed.

Over this past century we have seen many educational institutions of mainline churches become conformed to the standards and practices of the worldly academia.

Most of these institutions in charge of training church leaders do not teach faith, hope, love, or enable Biblical Transformation.

What they teach are empirical facts. They instill modern social causes and mold humanitarians. In their destructive analytical approach they engrain the thought process of doubt.

I have seen educational systems that have carelessly destroyed the faith of believers under their care and undermined the loving Christian zeal within others.

They have done this for the sake of educating the Christians through the lens of modern academia instead of maturing a life of faith, hope, and love in Christ.

In fact many educators I have met do not believe in a soul or spirit per se that needs to be transformed, but simply a cognitive life that should steer clear of emotions. Emotions in modern academia are seen as primitive evolutionary nuisances and are an inessential part of the human religious existence.

They send pastors into the world that are full of head knowledge, but lack the heart of the transformed pastor. They send out CEOs, fact believers, program makers, followers of modern academia, and doubt mongers instead of loving shepherds shaped in the image of Christ.

An education is important. This is something I agree with, but Jesus, and much of the New Testament talks about *what* and *why* it is important for Christians to learn and *who* we should learn from.

Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (NIV).”

Many people have misinterpreted this verse. It has been misinterpreted so many times that many people are unaware of its true meaning.

The burden that people are tied to is the burden, or yoke, of many Pharisees in the synagogues and Sadducees of the Temple. In the time of Jesus the yoke of a teacher, or institution was their teaching.

Jesus many times accused some of the Pharisees of placing too heavy a yoke upon the people. It was a heavy handed teaching about life with God that was too hard to follow and left people without comfort and rest for their souls. It left people farther away from God, than nearer.

Listen to what Jesus tells the Pharisees in Luke 11:46 “Jesus replied, ‘And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.’”

Any religious leader that teaches Christ and makes following God a burden, because they lay down rule upon rule to be followed, is not following, nor has learned the Way of Christ.

Jesus said, “Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.” His teachings were never meant to be a burden to the people hearing them.

His truth was meant to set people free to love God and neighbor and not imprison them to a system

of do's and don'ts and the accompanying spiritual burdens they bring.

Part of the problem is that people forget that all the law and teachings are based upon two commandments. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22: 37-40).

Pastor's without the foundation of love and who fail to show visible love for God and people are not pastors in the biblical sense.

I claim they may only be CEO's, burden makers, money mongers, and/or false teachers that are blind. (Matthew 15:14).

This now leads me to all the misled uneducated pastors who have been self taught, or have been taught a doctrine full of error.

In either case, whether they are educated and blind, or uneducated and blind, I believe they have the same problem.

They don't have the eyes to see, or the ears to hear, because they don't have the Spirit of God to discern, or the humbleness of being open to their own misled motives and perspectives.

Paul explains the true Christian understands and responds to the truth because, "We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Co 2:12).

What exists in the United States is a Christian religion that has become entwined with capitalistic pursuits, propagates a consumerism mentality, and is dependent upon ungodly democratic counsels. It has been shaped to uphold and undergird the pursuit of the proverbial American dream.

The gospel is even being used as a means for profit and for the perpetuation of the unspoken, but yet engrained American ideal of the pursuit of worldly wealth and happiness.

In doing so Christianity in the United States has become Americanize to the point that in some cases they wrongly sell the blessings of Jesus to the public to the highest givers, or those who make a donation to support its misguided institutional pursuits.

Many pastors are not even taught to discern the faith and the life of the church from the ways of the United States and its ungodly democratic and consumer mentality.

Leaders and congregants have been indoctrinated by their culture, education and twisted view of Christ and the church through this lens.

This has birthed a version of Christian living that is sinful and leads people astray from the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ.

This can leave entire churches and denominations ineffectual for the kingdom of God, but possibly successful from the American point of view.

A Church may be growing, prosperous, and by all appearances seem healthy, but inside it could be full of all sorts of detestable things.

Jesus warns a church in Revelation for having the same mentality and sin (Rev. 3: 14-22).

Many churches rely upon tactics, psychology, and aiming at the lusts and desires of the people to bring them in, and mold them accordingly.

They say they want to reach people where they are, but never move them to where God wants them to be.

Churches do this without ever focusing on the gospel of God that has the power for salvation.

In some cases the gospel seems to be the unwanted necessity that is quickly spoken, assented to and forgotten, so that the preaching and teaching aimed at living the American dream can be returned to.

It is the gospel of God that has the power for salvation. The American pursuit of wealth and happiness does not have this power, nor will it ever.

This is why a group of Christians can build a 120 million dollar facility and not think twice about the massive amount of poor, hungry, and lost around them.

A young woman once told me a true story about a certain church that owned a high rise building in a large American city.

The main church was on the first floor. The Pastors house was the penthouse. She said it was decked out like a penthouse too. It had all the perks and amenities of the wealthy.

The rest of the high rise buildings were offices rented out to law firms and businesses. The board of the church had voted that all rents received would go into a fund for building repairs and that none of the money could be used for missions, or ministry.

The fund had collected over 100 million dollars and none of it could be used for the gospel of Christ! It could only be used for a building!

In the basement she volunteered to help out in their food kitchen for the poor and homeless. The homeless were ushered in through the back door like second class citizens.

I assume they didn't want the homeless to come through the front door. It was bad for business I assume.

There they were given clean undergarments and fed a meal.

The pastor of the high rise church showed up to watch and talk with the visiting volunteers. He was very proud of his church's ministry.

The woman asked him if he knew any of the weekly homeless visitors of the church by name. She asked him if he knew any of their stories, or had shared the good news of Christ with them.

The pastor did not know a single person there in the food kitchen. He had not talked to any of them. He said he was too busy with the business of the church to get involved in ministry.

Since when did the business of the pastor become business? When did the business of the church cease being about ministry to people, and the offering of salvation through the proclamation of the Good News and the learning and obeying of the teachings of Christ?

In this country it happened when leaders and educators began turning the church into a conformed community that looks and operates more like their world, than the transformed people who look like Christ.

It happened when the culture desired more of a business like structure and sporting event style worship that entertained, rather than changed.

We have forgotten that anything that sets itself up against the Way, the Truth, and Life of Christ is hated by God. It is Anti-Christ!

Jesus said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

Paul makes it clear when he says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you

will be able to test and approve what God's will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will (Ro 12:2).

And how does one gain a renewed mind?

Paul begins to deal with this issue in 1
Corinthians 2: 14-16, “The man without the Spirit does
not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God,
for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot
understand them, because they are spiritually
discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about
all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's
judgment:

“For who has known the mind of the Lord
that he may instruct him?”
But we have the mind of Christ.”

I believe that it is because Christian leaders and
followers do not have the Spirit, or mind of Christ that
they have become unable to discern what God's
perfect and good will is for His community.

They have religion, but what many don't have is
a loving relationship with the savior that births in them
the irresistible desire to honor Him as Lord of their life
in all things.

We must not forget that part of being able to
have the mind of Christ has to do with our
commitment to be transformed.

To have our minds renewed and transformed means desiring and being lovingly committed to knowing the mind of Christ. It means learning to humbly to obey everything Jesus taught and commanded through His perspective, because our love for Him is relentless in all of our ways (Matthew 28:20).

Democratic Sin

Let me return to the democratic aspect of the American Church.

I have sat in many church meetings where a decision has to be made and I was appalled at the way the decision came about.

Everyone would give their own opinion about what to do and why to do it. Many times they never used scripture, nor did they ask themselves what Christ would have us do.

I have sat in many meetings where they did not pray for God to reveal his will in their own hearts and minds.

I have set on many boards where the majority would vote a certain way that blatantly contradicted the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ, but it made sense to them in their own worldly understanding.

If we do not have the mind of Christ, then we are operating with the mind of men and women. We

are operating by what seems natural and best according to our own human thinking and desire.

I have seen many churches make democratic decisions that had nothing to do with God, or the gospel, or the mission of the church, but the decisions were made based on their own personal preferences.

They did not care if their decisions alienated others who were different than them. They did not care if their decisions shaped the Gathered of God into their own image, instead of the image of Christ.

The place where the church gathers should be a place where all, no matter what their race, culture, or economic status, can attend. But I have seen church boards that didn't care if this was the case at all.

I've seen in many churches those who desire only people who act like them, look like them, and speak like them. And this happens because the democratic majority rules and not the will of God.

I have also seen church boards whose members are new Christians, or are people who have been in the faith for some time and yet they have not learned the foundational concept in Christianity that teaches us to "Deny ourself, take up our cross, and follow Him daily."

They do not have the love, or the mind of Christ to make the right decisions for the community of faith. They are simply bodies that fill an empty space on the

church board and they rule through base and natural inclinations.

Church leadership should be knowledgeable and Christ-like enough to know what is not in the best interest of the kingdom.

These are only a few of the sins of American church leadership. For me, any church around the world that has such practices needs to turn back to the ways of God.

Humbleness in Leadership

Jesus also tells us what our leaders should look like and how they should act.

In Mark 10: 42-45 we read, “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NIV).

I’ve heard many leaders argue from the basis of business principles saying leadership in today’s churches should resemble leadership in modern business. They argue that it’s effective and essential in today’s church.

Jesus teaches this is not the case. We do not mimic the world. We follow Christ in His example and this never changes.

We do not follow religious leaders who dress themselves up in flowing robes and expensive jewelry like the Pharisees of old and we certainly don't dress up to impress God!

In 1 Samuel 17:7 we read, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'"

When religious leaders dress up they dress up to impress people. Jesus says something about this. In Luke 20: 46 we read, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets."

The church has become a place where men and women leaders seek honor, status, and wealth. They will do anything they can to fulfill what their lustful and sinful nature desires.

I was once told that if I didn't dress up I wouldn't get anywhere in the church.

Why? It certainly wasn't because I follow God's ways concerning the issue instead of the ways of men and women?

In many ways the church, like the American Society, is overly focused upon outward appearances, and shallow and superficial personalities that appease our base human nature. They really are not concerned if it hides the Truth of who they really are.

Jesus said, “First clean the inside of the cup and the outside will be clean also.”

It is shallow and superficial personalities that sway the people of America. If they look good, sound good, and appear favorable in our eyes, then they are likely to succeed, but God does not look at a man or woman the way men and women do and neither should we.

The culture in America swoons over movies stars, models, sports heroes, and charismatic figures, and it wants its pastors to be the same way.

How quickly we overlook the moral sin associated with such practices. We will give respect to the leader who looks the part, but often find in their actions and speech that they are nothing but whitewashed tombs full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean (Matthew 23:27).

We need to follow shepherds who walk like Jesus, who love like Jesus, and who serve us the Way Christ served the world by the sacrificial giving away of His life. This is the teaching of God we should follow on this matter, and not the wisdom of the world.

I have seen too many churches whose leaders exalt themselves over others. They demand people respect them because of their position and not because they have become like Christ and earned the respect of the people for being such.

Like the Pharisees, many of these preachers act like they are the gate of heaven. These leaders make people think that it is only through their teaching and by their authority and gifts that everyone is enabled to see God and receive His blessings.

I see many church leaders today who say read my book, put money in my plate, pay for my prayers and you will receive the overflow of God's grace and love.

They sell the truth of God that should be free for all. They also sell images, idols, and T-shirts of Jesus without telling the people the real Jesus can be seen in their hearts and in the lives of others who have the Spirit of Christ.

Where are all the Godly leaders? Where are the shepherds of Christ? I'm afraid to say that in this land they are few and far between.

It is because the pursuit of American Dream and the character of a greedy nation have formed them rather than Christ.

“But seek first my kingdom and my righteousness and I will provide for all your needs” (Matthew 6:33).

1 Timothy 6: 9-12 says, “People *who want to get rich* fall into temptation and a trap and into many *foolish and harmful desires* that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the *love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.”

Chapter 3

Sins of the Congregation

Indifference

Equally as bad are the swallowed cultural ideals concerning what being a Christian means and looks like?

Congregations in America are filled with indifferent pew warmers. They are content with an hour of worship and a week of self serving priorities.

Even when their consciences might be pricked on Sunday morning they soon forget the lesson learned after the Sunday meal and afternoon nap.

Many people will openly admit that when they enter the church they have thoughts focused on leaving. Worship for them is something to endure to avoid guilt, and not something to be willingly engaged in for the worship God.

What is interesting is that many of these indifferent congregants are the first to speak up when something happens in the church they don't like.

Like many of their leaders they will strain out the gnat and swallow the camel (Matthew 23:24). Though their own life is astray from the call of God for all Christians, they are the first to point out and aggrandize the faults of others. Remove the plank in your own eye first, before you start pointing out the insignificant faults of others.

Congregations filled with indifferent people have this mentality; “I’ll serve me first, instead of serving Him; I’ll live for me, instead of living for Him. I’ll follow my own understanding of Christianity, instead of seeking to understand what Christ calls us to obey and where Christ calls us to go.”

Follow Me VRS. The Love of Money

In Mark 8: 34-38 it says, “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels’” (NIV).

Before they were called Christians in Antioch they were called Followers of the **Way**. Jesus said, “I am the **Way**, the Truth, and the Life.” To follow Christ is the path of self denial, the path of the cross, and walking in the purposes and aims of Christ. This is what it means to be a Christian.

On the one hand we have self denial which is the continual life long process of denying ownership of

our life and surrendering it to Christ for the sake of the Good News, the love of God, and the love for neighbor at every occasion. It's called being a living sacrifice.

On the other hand we have the American Dream engrained in every aspect of the American culture that says, "Work hard and succeed and you will be rich. Then you can have fun enjoying life because you can afford the finer things, visit exotic places, and get the most of life. You will also gain the respect and status of those desiring what you have, and also the affluent and successful. People will look up to you and your life will be fulfilling." If this is your pursuit in life, then one thing is for certain. Your soul is in jeopardy.

It is in jeopardy because you cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:24). You cannot build storehouses of plenty and spend the rest of your life enjoying your riches (Luke 12: 16-21). The reason behind this is because you cannot deny yourself and make the kingdom and His righteousness your first priority if you are out for your own worldly comfort and success at the same time.

In seeking worldly comforts and success your plans and God's plans for your life conflict and it places your life off track. They are juxtaposed.

The American Dream oriented person believes that a man's life consists in the abundance of his possessions, but Jesus teaches the opposite (Luke 12:15).

Many Churches in the United States have mixed the ideals of the American Dream with Christianity and have come up with a version of Christianity that is against the Way and Truth and Life of God at its very core.

They have traded in the real Jesus of the Bible for an Americanized Jesus. They want Jesus on Sunday, but they don't want Him the rest of the week while they are pursuing comfort and wealth.

Jesus says, "It's easier to for a camel to go through the eye of a sewing needle, than for a rich man to get into heaven" (Mark 10:25).

So how does a rich man get into heaven? Maybe they need to hear what Jesus says to a certain rich man. "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19: 21).

Political Correctness

In the United States many Christians will not talk about Jesus publicly or privately to friends, co-workers, or neighbors. Why? There may be a number of reasons including, but not limited to; fear, ignorance, indifference, and political correctness.

The early church fought this. It was politically correct to acknowledge Caesar as God, but many Christians whose love for God would not permit them

to do such a thing chose the other option of death. They would not submit to the lie and deny God.

This is a good place to discuss what it means to take up the cross. Have you ever asked yourself what Jesus means when he says we are to take up the cross daily?

We might answer this by finding the answer to why Jesus took up the cross? If we answer this from God's perspective, or from Christian hindsight, then we might say it would be to save the world by atonement through His shed blood.

I think however we can better answer the question by looking through the eyes of those who caused Him to have to take up the cross? Why did the religious leaders want Jesus crucified?

Do you know why Jesus claimed He came into the world? Jesus said to Pilate, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, *for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.* Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37).

No wonder Jesus says that if we are ashamed of Him and His words in Mark 8, He will deny us before God at the judgment! It's because we were ashamed of Him and the Truth He came to share with the world.

To take up the cross is to give yourself to Christ and His mission to testify to the Truth. Jesus said, "I

am the Truth.” To deny the Truth of Christ is to deny Christ!

The religious leaders killed Jesus because they didn't like His version of the Truth that shined God's untainted light on their way, truth, and life.

Like Paul we cannot be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. If we are ashamed of Christ, we can be assured that we will be denied the Kingdom of God.

Good Seed

A Gallup Poll said that Christians in the United States are some of the most biblically illiterate in the world! (This means they don't know the scriptures)

This may surprise some, but as a pastor it doesn't surprise me, because I know this to be true. Even in the most Evangelical of the churches I have served I found this to be true.

If a person, or a people, as a whole are not committed to seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness as the first priority, then it shouldn't surprise anyone if they are biblically illiterate.

Jesus instructs that, “A person shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:3).”

If we need food to survive, then we certainly need the word of God to stay spiritually alive in the kingdom and His righteousness.

Jesus further drives home this point when he describes what people do with the word of God once they receive it.

The parable most of us know as “The Sower” drives home the point that if we let the things of the world get in our way, then we will miss the food for the soul God offers to us in the hearing and obeying of His Word.

Matthew 13: 22-23, “The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the *worries of this life* and the *deceitfulness of wealth* choke it, *making it unfruitful*. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who *hears the word and understands it*. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (NIV)”

To bear fruit means what? Go to John the Baptist for a moment. In Matthew 3:8 John tells the Pharisees to produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

In other words to produce fruit is to begin living life anew according to God’s ways and not your own determined or predetermined one followed by you. It is the literal turning around of your life to the Way, Truth, and Life of Christ.

I have stood before Church leaders and asked them if they have been feeding on God’s word and many times I will hear, “I’ve just been too busy.”

Many congregants in many congregations are too busy to read and feed upon the word of God. They have games to play, sporting events to attend, movies to watch and concerts to go to.

It is a horrible sin of the church to not be prepared to give answer for the hope that they have, nor care if they have one or not.

It is a terrible sin of a congregant if they are too ashamed to talk about Jesus to others; possibly because they are so biblically illiterate they couldn't even if they wanted to.

Gifts and Talents

The Parable of the Money (Luke 19: 12-27), and the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14-30) both describe a master who has lavished gifts upon His servants with the expectation that it be used wisely.

These parables are meant to teach us as the church that we are to use what God gives us sensibly.

When the servants use the gifts wisely they produce more than what they started with. They bore fruit unto repentance.

In other words their life began to look more like the life of Christ. Their thinking was changed to be more like that of Christ, and their heart had been changed to be more like that of Christ. Their life began to mimic the life of Christ in action and deed.

Does this sound familiar? Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and neighbor as yourself. Christ did everything perfectly in love to save us and become our redeemer and in doing so showed us the Way of God for us.

To be like Christ is the goal and end of every Christian life. It is the kingdom life and it is the righteousness of God.

Colossians affirms this in the first chapter when it says in 1: 15 that Christ is the image of the invisible God. We then learn in Colossians 3: 10 that we, in this life, are being renewed in that image.

This doesn't happen on its own. We must keep our lives connected to Christ who is the true vine (John 15). We connect to Christ first through Salvation. We continue to stay connected in Christ by the Spirit which waters us, by the Scriptures which feed us, and by bearing fruit unto repentance.

Paul says we all have been given gifts (Romans 12:6). He also tells us that these gifts and God's call upon our life are irrevocable (11:29). And one day we as Christians, the servants in the parables, will all answer for what we did with the gifts that God has given to us! (Romans 14:10)

The American church is full of spectators. It is not uncommon to have people who have been in the church all their life and have never experienced transformation or change to become like Christ.

They don't even know what gift God has given to them. The Word of God has had no effect on their actions, their thinking, or their response to give of themselves by denying themselves, taking up their cross and following Him. They have not born any fruit unto repentance. They still look very much like their old selves and not God in whose image they are being renewed in. What will happen to these people at the Judgment?

The Judgment

In the parables of the Money and Talents there are those who didn't produce any fruit unto repentance. They will simply be cast into the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins illustrates this as well (Matthew 15: 1-13). Many Christians will not do what it takes to produce fruit unto repentance.

For whatever reason they wait to prepare themselves to meet Christ, but their excuses and last minute efforts will fail. They will be shut out permanently of God's Eternal kingdom.

There will be even those who call Jesus Lord and claim to have done great things in His name on the judgment day, but Jesus will say I don't know you (Matthew 7: 21-23).

Their belief in God was shallow and love was faked. It was a surface level proclamation and human

learned gifts they offered. They didn't produce genuine fruit unto repentance. Their lives may have imitated Christ, but their hearts were far from Him.

Both love and action must be present hand in hand. The love must inspire the works, but the works shouldn't be used to inspire God to love us.

Apparently these people didn't know and love God intimately the way a wife knows a husband and the husband knows a wife. They knew of God and used Him possibly for their own gain, for their own fame, or for their own comfort. In the end all they will know intimately the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

We have many fakers and actors in the church. They put on a show, dress the part, but have no love for God, or neighbor. 1 John says if we say we know God and do not love our brothers and sisters, then we are liars.

These professing Christians are sometimes hateful, unforgiving, and rule oriented. They are the unsaved weeds in God's garden. They are the enemy's children amongst us.

Chapter 4

The life of the Saved

How do I know if I am saved?

If you have to ask this question, then you are probably not saved.

You may say, “I believe, I serve in the church, and I try to do the best I can, but I don’t know if I am saved.”

I respond by asking, “Do you love Him? Do you feel the Spirit of God within You? Do you know Him well enough to call Him Father? Does your love for Him drive you forward and cause you strive for Him? If so, then you are probably saved.

Most American Christians tell me they love Him and they do call Him Father, but they don’t know if they have ever felt the Spirit of God. They are not moved to serve Him, and they are not living to be changed into the new creation God has called them to become?

I respond by saying, “Then you really can’t say that you know God intimately.”

The saved life begins with repentance, baptism, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). This process is called being born again.

The receiving of the gifts of the Spirit of God is actually the beginning of our new life. Once we lived without God and now we live intimately with God.

We are not instantly made to be like Jesus, as some believe. Even though some of us move forward in this process of surrendering to the Spirit of God quicker than others, but we all still live in these corruptible human bodies until the coming of the Lord or our death.

This is why in Galatians 5 we read that the flesh will work against us following the Spirit, and the Spirit will also work against the flesh.

We hear this again in Romans 8. Paul tells the Christians in Rome that if the Spirit of Christ is in us, then by the power of the Spirit we will put to death the misdeeds of the body.

Those who do not change do not have the Spirit of God in them. If they do not have the Spirit of God in them, then Paul says they are not saved, or they are not in Christ. We must be in Christ to produce fruit. The fruit is evidence of our being in Christ.

Jesus said we should pray fervently if we desire the Spirit (Luke 11:13). He also teaches us that the Spirit guides us into all truth. It is how we come to know God and even to love God.

When we walk by the Spirit we begin to see the fruit of Christ (Galatians 5) overcoming our wickedness and putting to death the misdeeds of the

body, but if we walk by the flesh we will live to please ourselves and put out the Spirit's fire.

The majority of Americans live to please themselves, they think more highly of themselves than they ought, and they do not consider others to be greater than they are, because they have not humbled themselves like a little child and come before Christ as the Lord of all their life.

Salvation is indeed a free gift made possible by God through Jesus Christ, but those who really want salvation will deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him every day. They will cast off all things and consider all things rubbish to have Him completely. We see this concept explained in the parable of the pearls and hidden treasure.

The lives of the saved will be working out their salvation in fear and trembling and they will look more and more like Christ as life progresses.

We are to live in His Way, Proclaim His truth, and Live through His Life before others and not close our mouths or our eyes in fear. If we don't, then we can expect to hear Christ say, "I have denied you before my Father who is in heaven, because you have denied me before others in the world."

If you are part of this Sinful American Church, or if you have seen clearly the error of your perceptions and ways in the light of God's word, then repent.

Turn to Him now and you will find He will run to you and embrace you as a child who was once dead, but is alive again.

I have not covered all the Sins of the American Church, but this certainly has given us a good place to begin waking people up.